

JULIET'S LOVERS

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Juliet's Lovers

BY

MABEL COLLINS

AUTHOR OF

'THE PRETTIEST WOMAN IN WARSAW,' 'VIOLA FANSHAWE,'
'A DEBT OF HONOUR,' ETC.

'Fatal creature, bitter-sweet!'

SAPPHO.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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JULIET'S LOVERS.

CHAPTER I.

“Socrates calls love the *Wizard*; Sappho, the
Weaver of fictions.”

JULIET VANE was the result of one of those unfortunate marriages which are a characteristic of these *fin-de-siècle* days.

Her mother, Marguerite Vane, was an actress. She was a tragedienne of the first water; but the world never saw her at her best, nor knew what her genius really was, because, when she was just at the summit of the ladder—when she had put her pretty foot on the last round, she left the stage.

After playing comparatively trivial parts for two or three years, she came to the great opportunity which arrives in the life of every genius. A manager recognised her merit, and gave her an opening in London in Shakespearian drama. This was absolutely her *métier*; in life and on the stage she was cut out for a Shakespearian heroine. First she played Beatrice, and won the town with her smiles; then Rosalind, and captivated it with her grace; then she was given the final, the sublime opportunity! She played Juliet; and London succumbed to her youth, her beauty, her divine genius, her tragic, emotional atmosphere.

But she only played it on the stage for a week; then she deserted the footlights to play the same part in private life.

She committed the great mistake. She fell in love. The "fatal creature, bitter-

sweet," came to her, and heaped her lap with flowers, and then tore her heart in twain.

Lord Francis Ellerton, then about thirty-four years of age, but not looking more than twenty-five, was the man who won her to himself, and took her from the world, from her profession, and deprived the stage of a bright light.

They were married very quietly. Marguerite Vane loved Lord Francis with all the fervour and passion of her Juliet-like heart; but, as Lord Francis himself expressed it in later years, she was "not to be bought with any trinket but a wedding-ring."

What his love for her was, may be guessed, when one knows that his marriage with her was literally the result of a wager. A certain leader of fashion among the gilded youth of the day, who had laid steady

siege to Marguerite's affections without result, made a heavy bet with Lord Francis that he would be equally unlucky. Now, Lord Francis had lost heavily at cards to this admirer of Marguerite's; if he won the wager, the debt of honour, which was distinctly inconvenient at the moment, would be wiped off; moreover, the bet was made in the presence of a select crowd of the *jeunesse dorée* and Lord Francis felt that his reputation as a lady-killer was at stake. He determined, therefore, to go in and win at any cost. He was troubled when he found not diamonds, nor horses, nor an expensive villa, was the price he had to pay, but simply a slender gold ring. He could not afford to retreat, though marriage was the last folly he had ever proposed to commit. Therefore he went on, with the more readiness that Marguerite's exquisite charm inspired a warm passion in him

for the time being. And he was very proud to take her from the stage, and let all the world know that it was because of him that her place was empty! The theatre-goers cursed him, and he gloried in it.

It was impossible for Marguerite to resist him, for she loved in earnest. And she believed in his love. It would have been a worldly-wise woman indeed who would not have believed in it! One of the curious facts in human life is that the men who love seldom know how to make love. Lord Francis did not possess a heart himself, but he knew how to make a woman's heart throb to the point of agony.

Well, they were married. And Marguerite from thenceforward lived in a nun-like seclusion. For she soon found that Lord Francis had not the slightest idea of giving her her place as his wife, or of presenting her to

his family and society as Lady Francis. He was at the age when diplomacy has a fascination for men of his type, and he preferred to visit the courts of Europe as a bachelor. In the early days of their marriage this did not trouble Marguerite. She was too happy, too lost in her dream of love, to care about anything outside the charmed circle in which she lived. For more than a year Lord Francis was a devoted lover and husband; and he always looked back on this afterwards as an extraordinary circumstance, which showed how great were Marguerite's charms, and how profound his sacrifices for her sake. When their child was born, she was called Juliet, in memory of that night when her mother, in all the glory of her youth and power, came on the stage and saw the man who was to change her whole life, sitting in the stalls. His eyes held her; they seemed to penetrate her soul, and tell her a love-

tale such as even Shakespeare knew not of. That was because her heart suddenly awoke ; and the story of one's own love is of necessity infinitely more beautiful than that of any other.

Juliet inherited her mother's passion, her mother's genius, and her beauty ; she was a reproduction of her. Marguerite was known as Mrs Ellerton ; but when Juliet herself went on the stage she took her mother's maiden name. This, however, was not until after that mother was dead. Marguerite's desire, and earnest prayer, was that her daughter should never become an actress. In her brief, bright career she had seen enough of the dark side of the life to make her dread it for her child. She knew what its hardships were ; its crosses and disappointments. The world knows nothing of these ; it only sees the actor and actress when they are successful ; when they fail, or are pushed back, no one

thinks of them. But even in Marguerite's exceptionally fortunate stage life, she had often shed hot tears of anger and of disappointment; glad was she to leave the arena; and she hoped her child might never enter it. If she had lived longer probably Juliet would have married young, or entered on some other profession, and this history would never have been written. But, after educating Juliet perfectly, training her in all arts and accomplishments, and instilling into her an almost Puritanical spirit of purity, Lady Francis Ellerton died suddenly and unexpectedly of heart disease, leaving the proud, beautiful, reserved, inexperienced girl to face the world alone. Perhaps worse than alone; for she believed in her father. Marguerite, like all romantic women, insisted on worshipping her idol to the end; and she taught Juliet the same religion. One of the most cruel mistakes made by good women is in

the rearing of their daughters. Juliet was an instance of it. She had been so sheltered and screened from all evil that she did not know of its existence. She was educated to a standard of nobility, virtue, purity of thought and feeling, and disinterestedness such as is utterly out of place in the nineteenth century. Such girls are turned out, defenceless, into the world every day by loving mothers, who think that in this way they make them good and happy. It is like thrusting a lamb into the midst of a pack of wolves. Marguerite, in her love, was a "weaver of fictions"; for her Lord Francis remained always what he had at first appeared. It was so easy to deceive her, that this cynical man of the world thought it less trouble to do so than to disillusion her, as he would otherwise have done. And so she died, having lived a Juliet's life, with the name of her Romeo on her lips and graven on her

heart. And she left her child to find out, by degrees, what that Romeo really was.

Juliet Vane was seventeen when her mother died; of the voluptuous type of beauty — tall, white-skinned, with warm brown hair and golden-brown eyes; finely shaped, yet slight enough to have something serpentine in her movements. She had every physical and mental advantage for taking the town by storm, as her mother had done before her; and no sooner was Marguerite laid away in her grave than Lord Francis suggested to her that she should make the attempt.

His reasons for this were simple enough. Marguerite had been possessed of a small income, which died with her. Lord Francis had willingly enough contributed to her establishment, partly because she had an undeniable claim on him, and partly because,

as he expressed it, he had "been very fond of her at one time."

But he had not the slightest idea of providing for Juliet. He considered that her inherited gifts were quite a sufficient provision for her; and he proposed that she should turn them to advantage as soon as possible. With Juliet on the stage under her mother's maiden name, he felt that he would be rid of all responsibility, and his marriage would be as though it had never been. He was wonderfully young looking still, with that gleam of youth in eye and mouth that is so lovable, and which only very wicked and unscrupulous persons ever seem able to preserve. Probably this is because they have no dealings with their consciences—an immense saving of wear and tear. However that may be, Lord Francis was still in the prime of life; extremely handsome, very distinguished looking, and with a con-

summate charm of manner ; courted, petted, fêted wherever he went. It is little wonder that he wished to free himself from the responsibilities brought on him by the follies of his early youth, of which Juliet was one.

CHAPTER II.

“An infant, crying in the night.”

DURING the whole of his married life, Lord Francis retained his bachelor establishment in Half-Moon Street, where he gave some of the pleasantest dinners given in London, and where some most exciting and protracted card-parties were held. For Marguerite he took, when they married, one of those delightful villas on Putney Hill, a remote suburban residence, where the air is almost as fresh as on Dartmoor, and the flowers grow luxuriantly, and yet one is within easy driving distance of Piccadilly. When they were first married he lived in this pretty box, and drove into town every afternoon; gradually this arrangement re-

versed. Then he gave up the daily drives, and visited Putney Hill once or twice a week; eventually once or twice a month. By that time he had separated his life entirely from Marguerite's; the love-dream was over. And yet it lived in her heart, always, to the end. It was part of her religion to think that a woman's love should remain the same, unchanged even by the presence of a doubt. She was one of those who look on men as beings of a different race from women. Lord Francis, when he did come, treated her with the profound respect and devotion of an old-world admirer; he never allowed his indifference or cynicism to mar the beauty of his manner. And this was enough for her, poor soul!

Well, she was gone, and Juliet was alone in the Putney villa, with the servants and her old nurse, Mrs Graham. This woman

had been Marguerite's dresser, her theatrical maid, and had become so attached to her that when her mistress left the stage she followed her fortunes. And since then she had lived the humdrum life of a confidential maid, nurse, housekeeper, and companion, in the quiet of Putney. She was an old woman now, though upright and active. She was always busy, always neatly dressed, and always to be depended on when she was wanted. Juliet looked upon her as a fact in nature, and would as soon have expected to be without her as to be without light in the daytime. But it rather startled her, in the awful quiet and silence of the house after her mother's funeral, to realise that she had no woman friend in the world but Graham.

She had been passionately fond of her mother; indeed her love for her coloured her whole life. She would estimate her

words and deeds to the end by her mother's standard; years afterwards she found herself hesitating before committing herself to some action, and wondering whether her mother would have approved of it. The tie between them was so strong, that it was no wonder she was prostrated by the sudden and utterly unexpected shock of her loss. She looked like a beautiful ghost when Lord Francis came out to see her one day, about ten days after all the signs of death had been removed from the house—excepting the black dresses. It was summer, and Juliet sat in the garden in her black robes, her hands lying idle in her lap, her eyes closed, languid from the tears they had shed. Mrs Graham sat beside her sewing, and talking a little. When Lord Francis drove up to the gate and entered the garden, she did, as she had always done in Marguerite's lifetime

—rose stiffly, curtsied very profoundly, and went away. If such an expression can be used of people placed so far apart by station and circumstances, she and Lord Francis had never liked each other. But the aversion had been a silent one on both sides, neither ever having given cause for complaint.

Lord Francis sat down on a chair opposite Juliet, and regarded her very seriously.

“You positively mustn’t cry any more, dear child,” he said, “you will make yourself so ill.”

“I think I have finished,” said Juliet wearily. “I have no strength left.”

“It has been an awful trial for you,” said Lord Francis; “but don’t let it make you ill. That would only make *her* sad, if she knew.”

“Yes,” said Juliet. She had heard this argument so often in the last few days.

“When will you be fit to think about

things?" asked, Lord Francis. "You know we must decide what you are going to do—where you are going to live, and how."

"Oh, I suppose so!" said Juliet, a little startled. This necessity had never occurred to her. She had imagined herself going on living always just as she was, and just as she had always lived. But Lord Francis soon gave her a new view of things.

"Can't I stay here?" she asked, somewhat doubtfully, not quite knowing, as a matter of fact, what it was that had to be decided. However, Lord Francis soon enlightened her.

"Well," he said, as if considering the matter for the first time, "not very well alone; but I can find a lady to live with you, if you prefer to live in a house of your own. That, however, isn't quite so much the trouble as the matter of expense. You see your mother's income is at an end

now, and unfortunately I am not as rich as I ought to be. I am one of those unlucky members of the aristocracy whose income is totally insufficient for their wants and the demands made on them. In a couple of months I have to go to St Petersburg, and it will cost me a pretty penny. And before then I must see you settled satisfactorily."

"You know I will do anything you wish," said Juliet. "Only tell me what it is." To her this was the ideal man, her mother's idol, and her own; the man who must always be right, because he was her own dear father. This unreasoning trust of good, affectionate women!

"That's spoken well," said Lord Francis (and well he might so say!). "Well, then, dear, I'll tell you exactly what I have in my mind. I want you to think about going on the stage. You have all your

mother's talent, and her appearance. You have even one advantage—you are taller. You got your height from me. But don't cry any more!—you will get lines in your face!”

Lord Francis was looking at her critically while he spoke, much as he might have looked at a young horse he proposed to enter for a race. Abject worshipper though she was at this shrine, yet something in his words, and the way he spoke, struck cold upon her heart.

“She did not want me to go on the stage,” said Juliet, turning her head away to hide the two hot tears that sprang into her eyes as she spoke.

“I know that,” said Lord Francis reflectively. “But I think it would be different if she could see you now. I know she had the idea that you would marry before she left you—though how you were ever to

get married, living here like a nun, I can't imagine. Of course, you would have had to go into some sort of society, and go about the world a little. It's no good thinking about that now, because you've no one to take you about; and, besides, there's the awful money question."

There was a pause. For the first time in her life Juliet, who had always been guarded and cared for like a rare exotic or a precious jewel, realised that she might be in the way. The first time this consciousness comes is one of the most dreadful moments in the lives of the spoiled darlings of tender mothers.

She had enough innate sense to know that she was too ignorant of the world to make any suggestion herself. She was conscious that her father was talking as she had never heard him talk before. She did not understand the difference, and

wanted time to realise it and know how to meet it. He had always preserved a certain tone of romance with Marguerite ; that was gone now. Juliet was dimly aware that she was being, so to speak, "valued," and that, after all, while in her present position, she was not worth much.

"Is there not something else I could do?" she asked presently ; "I think it would grieve her to think I had gone into the life she seemed to dislike so."

"Well, my dear girl, try if you like. How will you set about it? Answer advertisements for governesses? From what I see in the comic papers, governesses don't get any salaries now-a-days. You wouldn't do for a lady-help ; and you have not been educated for a telegraph clerk. Take my advice, Juliet. You were born for the stage. Don't throw away

your fortune because of a fancy. And I can put you there, I think. A manager who knew your mother much wishes to see you. Whereas, in those other interesting professions which I have mentioned, I can do nothing for you. I don't want to see you doing other people's work and starving over it. I want to see you succeed in the world."

"As you will," said Juliet indifferently. She was in reality too worn out with her grief and too absorbed in it to care much what became of her. She agreed to what her father said simply to please him.

"Well, then, I'll drive Heywood down here to-morrow," said Lord Francis. "Tell Graham I shall bring a friend to lunch. And don't cry any more to-night! If we can arrange things with Heywood, I will find a lady to live with you

and I daresay you'll get on very well."

"At all events," was his mental conclusion to this speech, "I shall have done my best."

CHAPTER III.

“There is, we see, a vagabond friendship.”

ARTHUR HEYWOOD was generally supposed in the theatrical profession to be mad. If he was, then there was a wonderful amount of method in his madness. He was perfectly aware of his reputation for extreme eccentricity, and found it very useful. He could say the most atrociously insolent things, on occasion, under cover of this infirmity; he could indulge in breaches of good manners, in outbreaks of temper, which otherwise would be inexcusable. But it was noticed, by those who took the trouble to study him, that these lapses never occurred when they would stand in the way of his own interests; only when they would be of

service. No man knew better how to imitate good manners, though the veneer was somewhat too coarsely put on and too palpable, savouring a little of burlesque. He never forgot the veneer when he was with Lord Francis.

These two had been allies since the early days, when Marguerite Vane was the favourite of the town, Lord Francis one of the gilded youth, and Arthur Heywood a poor actor, living in a garret.

Heywood was of such a grotesque appearance that it was only possible for him to play certain parts. He was so thin as to resemble a skeleton, his face cadaverous and deeply lined, with a curious look of an old woman's countenance about it. To such a man, the career of the *jeune premiér* is for ever closed. But, having great ability of a peculiar kind, he made a hit in character parts—being especially successful in the sim-

ulation of drunken madness. He scraped acquaintance with some of the gay lordlings who haunted the theatres, and discovered ingenious ways of making himself useful to them. In this manner he had got to know Lord Francis, and one of those vagabond friendships sprang up between the two, which are so unaccountable to outsiders, and yet which we sometimes see outliving other and more natural associations. So it was in this case.

Eighteen years ago these two began to give and take, and they still found each other extremely useful. Heywood was now a manager, with a London theatre, and companies constantly on tour in the country. He knew every art and trick of the trade—how to squeeze the goodly premium out of the innocent aspirant, how to overreach an experienced professional in the making of a contract, how to

take money with both hands, and pay with neither. With Lord Francis he was always on his best behaviour, for he knew that he had to deal with a man as clever as himself. Each had a consummate genius for playing a hand quietly, whether at whist or in life; each could "bluff" to perfection at poker, or in a business transaction. And, in this vagabond friendship, the real ground of respect felt by both lay in the fact that he thought the other to be, if possible, the greater villain.

Heywood was now not only a manager, but a dramatic author. He wrote plays, and brought them out at his own theatres,—a system he found excellent, because there were no authors to pay. Some persons—and they were not a few—who disliked him, either with or without a reason, discovered unaccountable resemblances to other plays, and strange importations

from works in other languages, in his dramatic masterpieces. But this did not trouble Arthur Heywood. As he would innocently declare, with a Uriah - Heap-like modesty, he was a poor uneducated wretch, who knew no language but his own. So long as his enterprises paid, and he just steered clear of the law, he cared nothing for what might be said about him.

The whole question of Juliet's appearance on the stage had been talked over thoroughly with him before Lord Francis mentioned it to Juliet herself. Nothing remained but for Heywood to see her. He freely allowed that if she was her mother over again, as Lord Francis represented, she would be just what he wanted. He had a new play ready to bring out, which he had tested once or twice in remote provincial towns without much success. He attributed this to the fact that on both occasions the *ingénue*, a very import-

ant character in the piece, had been very badly played. He had taken premiums for both these appearances, a slight consolation to himself for the unfortunate results, but none to the public. He knew that if he brought out the play in London there were only two or three professionals on the stage able to play the part, and that all these young ladies knew their price perfectly well and would exact it. He was quite aware that he could not get a premium from Lord Francis, as he would have done from anybody else, for putting Juliet on the stage; but he rightly judged that if she was her mother over again, she would play the part better than any of the professionals he had been considering, and he would get her, for a first engagement, for a third of the money. So that the drive down to Putney with Lord Francis was quite a matter of business. He intended to see Juliet, and if she proved equal to his expecta-

tions, to enter upon a courtly and polite tug-of-war with his old friend, and make the best possible bargain over her that he could.

This was the visitor Lord Francis brought with him to lunch the next day.

Juliet was walking in the garden. When the carriage stopped at the gate she turned and came across the grass to meet her visitors, her black robe trailing behind her. She carried no sunshade, and walked bare-headed in the bright light, which revealed all the perfection of her fair skin and richly-tinted hair.

"She's all right," was Heywood's comment as he looked at her. And Lord Francis heard the praise with as much satisfaction as if it had been expressed in the most elegant manner possible. He knew what it meant from Heywood ; a daily paper criticism of two columns could not contain more eulogy.

Juliet was much surprised to see what

appeared to be quite a young man, though a surprisingly ugly one, approaching her. One of the curious things about Heywood was that he really looked very little older now, when he was admiring her, than he had looked eighteen years ago, when he had admired her mother. He had been an old-young man then, and though the adjectives were reversed now, the effect was much the same. Sometimes he would say to Lord Francis (who had an abject terror of the advent of wrinkles and other marks of decadence), "I have the advantage of you there, my Lord ; I'm not afraid of growing old, for I'm used to it ; I have never been young."

But he knew very well how to seem young. When he chose, Heywood could assume the most delightful manner, and could very often captivate a new acquaintance with it. He was seldom equal to the task of sustaining this manner after the first interview, and

people who liked him at first were left to marvel afterwards at the total disappearance of whatever it was which had pleased them. He was in his best vein to-day; and kept Juliet almost amused with his bright talk. Lord Francis wandered into the garden after lunch with his cigar, and left the two together for a little while, and then Heywood spoke to Juliet of her mother so feelingly that he quite won her heart.

“Well?” said Lord Francis, when they were in the carriage again driving to town.

“She’s all you said, my Lord, and even handsomer than her mother. But I shall have to teach her everything, and take all the risks. I must have some of the advantages too; that’s only fair. I’ll take her, but I must have a contract for five years.”

“How much?” asked Lord Francis laconically. Heywood named a figure. He had been trying, all lunch time, to

make up his mind whether he dare name a lower one.

Lord Francis shook his head.

“No, Heywood, that’s not good enough. We’re old friends, of course, but it’s my duty to look after the child’s interests. She shall sign a contract for a year at that salary, but not for a day longer.

“You mean that?” said Heywood, quietly.

“Certainly I do. You don’t suppose I put the girl on the stage for amusement, or to exhibit her good looks? I don’t want Marguerite’s daughter to become a part of the fringe of society; besides, it would be no use—she hasn’t got it in her, any more than her mother had. They belong to the romantic type. No, Juliet will either be a good woman, sacrificing herself for some useless, high-flown idea—and I’m thankful to say she hasn’t picked

up an idea yet, for which to undergo torture—or else a great artist. I intend her to be a great artist. Under these circumstances you must perceive that her salary is very important.”

“It’s a hard bargain, my Lord,” said Heywood. He was very thoughtful. He wanted the honour and glory of bringing out Marguerite Vane’s daughter; he wanted her to appear in his new play; he wanted to oblige Lord Francis; but it irked his very soul not to benefit more over the transaction. Still, a year was something; and after all, she might not be a success.

“That or nothing,” said Lord Francis briefly; and changed the conversation.

Heywood followed his cue, thinking the while. Of course, there were plenty of other theatres, and plenty of other managers. With Juliet’s name, from her mother; her father’s influence, and her own beauty,

there would be small difficulty indeed in bringing her out.

Lord Francis was to drop Heywood at the stage door of his theatre. As the carriage turned into the side street in which this door was situated, Heywood reverted to the subject on which his thoughts dwelled.

"I'll take her, my Lord," he said; "I'll draw up a contract for a year. But before it is signed I must see her rehearse. I'll send her part down to-morrow."

"All right," said Lord Francis. "I thought you'd be a sensible fellow. Come into my place after the theatre to-night—there will be a few men there."

So Juliet's fate was sealed; and Lord Francis, very well satisfied that he had done his duty by her, forgot all about his daughter until circumstances brought her again before his mind. He departed to fulfil the

manifold engagements of an evening in London in the season, as became one of the most popular nobleman of the day.

The next morning Juliet received her "part." It was all Greek to her, for she had never seen a part before, and had not yet discovered that mysterious power in herself, by which an actor or actress can interpret these isolated speeches, without wanting to know anything about the plot or the story. It is said that one of the most successful actresses of this generation has often played without even understanding the meaning of the words she spoke herself, much less the purport of the rest of the piece. Juliet turned over the pages idly, unable to grasp any meaning in them, and laid them by.

Mrs Graham, coming to Juliet about some trivial matter, paused suddenly in the midst of what she was saying, and

looked at the roll of manuscript on the table, covered with brown paper, the one word "Evangeline" written on it. She recognised the look of the thing instantly, and started, as if at a snake in the grass.

"You are going on the stage, Miss?" she said.

"Yes, Graham, I suppose so," said Juliet, with a sigh; "papa wishes it."

"And what has Mr Heywood to do with it?" asked Mrs Graham, with the curiosity pardonable in so old and trusted a servant.

"He is the manager of the theatre," said Juliet.

"Manager of a theatre, is he?" said Mrs Graham. "I can remember when he was something very different, when he wasn't above borrowing a shilling of a dresser and forgetting to pay it back! Dear Miss Juliet, I saw him yesterday, and knew him at a glance; he's very little altered

in all this time. I've been wondering if he had come here on any business. Miss Juliet, if you have any business dealings with him, be sharp! He'll cheat you if he can."

"Papa will arrange all the business," said Juliet; "fancy your remembering the man! He is very ugly, but rather nice."

"Ah, that's his stage-ways," said Mrs Graham; "you won't think him nice after you've seen him once or twice more. And so you're really going on the stage, Miss! It seems only natural. You must let me dress you, though I'm old now; I should never think any one else would do it properly. Do you know your words?—I used to hear your dear mother all her parts."

Graham was like an old war-horse, smelling the fray again; and with her assistance Juliet actually got interested in her new

work. It did her good; it relieved the tension of her grief. And when the day for rehearsal came, she looked more like herself, in the new excitement, than she had done since her mother's death.

Juliet had not seen anything of stage life, and her mother had never talked to her about it; so that all the detail was as novel to her as to the veriest outsider. She felt chilled when she went out of the bright sunshine of the morning into the gloomy darkness of the theatre, lit by a solitary, flaring, unshaded gas jet on the stage. There is nothing in any other profession so depressing to a beginner as a theatrical rehearsal. In the summer, you are stifled, in the winter, frozen; there are no softenings of the grim surroundings such as make them palatable at night. Everybody is more or less cross, and silent, except the determined young men

who never lose an opportunity for flirtation, and who are never daunted. They are just bearable at first, but when the luncheon-hour has long passed, and hunger claims you for its own, they appear impertinent drivellers. About three o'clock there is but one way to the heart of an actress at rehearsal, and that can only be effected by evading the stage manager's eye, and surreptitiously leaving the theatre to pay a visit to the nearest place where food and wine are sold—returning with full pockets. Fortunately for Juliet, she had an invaluable lieutenant in old Mrs Graham, who knew the detail of stage life entirely. She accompanied Juliet to rehearsal, and carried with her a small basket, about which she said nothing till the hour for opening it arrived. A glass of champagne and a sandwich came on the scene, therefore, at the very moment when Juliet's

spirits were beginning to droop utterly, and when the weariness of the dark theatre was making her long to be back in her Putney garden. She recovered herself, and when the time came for her important speeches, showed that she had an instinctive knowledge of her work, though entirely ignorant of technical business.

This went on for a week, Heywood standing every day down by the footlights to watch her every movement, getting more and more interested with every rehearsal. He seldom said anything, usually standing silent, with an ugly grin on his face, which he intended to convey the idea that he was quite pleased with all concerned. He was much too careful a man to indulge in ebullitions of temper, such as some managers indulge in, and he never swore at anybody. He was one who thought, and calculated, and waited his

hour. That was just what he was doing now.

Meeting him one evening at the end of the week, Lord Francis asked him how Juliet was getting on.

“Oh, she’ll do, my Lord,” was the brief answer. Lord Francis began to think about the matter. “What is he up to, that he is not more enthusiastic?” he asked of himself. “Some dark game, I am sure. But what can he do? I will get that contract signed.”

But before he had time to attend to this he was distracted by another affair. He found a letter on his breakfast-table one morning which put him immediately into a bad temper. He took it up and looked it over before opening it—a sure sign of deep distrust of the contents, when the handwriting is perfectly familiar. And Lord Francis not only felt this same deep distrust, but an utter loathing of the

handwriting and of every detail which reminded him of the person it came from.

“I thought I had done with her!” he said to himself. “What *can* she want now?”

It would seem that she wanted a great deal, to judge by the expression on Lord Francis’ face as he read through the letter—four pages, written closely in a strong, untidy hand. At one point Lord Francis put the letter down with a gesture of despair.

“Left her husband! What on earth’s to be done?”

His air of horror and helpless anger would have delighted one of his enemies, or such a friend as Arthur Heywood. No one, however, had the pleasure of witnessing it, as, fortunately for himself, he was alone when he read this disagreeable missive.

“What am I to do with her?—what can I do with her?” he said to himself several times when he had finished it.

“Whatever I do afterwards, I suppose I must go over to Paris now and see her,” was his conclusion. “Fifty pounds would keep her quiet for a bit, I’ve no doubt; but then I haven’t got it to spare, and it would only mean starting the old plan again, which I really can’t afford. No, I must plant her out somehow. The awful question is how?”

The practical outcome of all this perplexity was, that Lord Francis ordered a portmanteau to be packed, and crossed over from Dover to Calais the same night. The next morning, about noon, he left his hotel, and took his way to the Rue Jacob. Here he found a certain number, rang at the bell, and asked for Madame Elwood. He was told to go up to the second floor, and knock at the first door. This he did, and a curious sight was that of this most distinguished-looking nobleman, mounting the bare stairway, which told of the poverty of the inmates of the

house; but there was no one to appreciate it, except Victoria Elwood herself. And she—when she had cried “*Entrez*” in answer to the knock at her door—when it opened, and the figure of Lord Francis became visible in the cloud of cigarette smoke which filled the room—appreciated it to the full.

CHAPTER IV.

“What is she, cut from love and faith?”

VICTORIA ELWOOD was more like a man than a woman in her movements, in her manners and habits; and she was not what is considered handsome. But she possessed a pair of eyes which would have attracted attention to her in any assembly—large, melting, liquid black eyes, fringed with long, black lashes. When she was excited the lids quivered, and the flicker of these lashes had a fascinating effect. Her figure was rather masculine, wanting in delicacy and feminineness; but her hands and feet were marvels, small, and wonderfully well shaped. The hand that held her cigarette would have delighted a sculptor, with its

fine tapering finger-ends; and it had a quiver, too, as she laid the cigarette down on the table beside her—a vibration, that spoke of a nature burning with passion, full of suppressed excitement and emotion. It was this suggestion of latent fever that gave her the power she sometimes had over persons of less ardent temperament, and with less excitable minds.

“So you have come,” she said, slowly, rising from her chair as Lord Francis entered.

“Yes. It was not much use to write. You have got into a pretty mess this time.”

Disregarding the second part of his speech, she answered the first with a sneer.

“And writing’s dangerous, too, isn’t it, as you’ve found out?”

Lord Francis shut the door carefully,

and then looked at the lady he had come to visit, with an expression of the greatest disapprobation possible. The sneer in her words was very fully repaid by the disgust on his face. Never was mutual hatred more fully expressed in two faces than in these two now.

Mrs Elwood wore a shawl-patterned dressing-gown, made with great severity, like a man's. Her blue-black hair was cut short, but was not curled. She was not in any sense untidy, but there was something uncompromising in her whole appearance. The room she occupied was one of the barest and simplest of furnished apartments which are let to impecunious people in this part of Paris; it was not squalid, yet Lord Francis looked round it with a shudder. She caught the meaning of the roving glance, and answered it, fixing his gaze again, meanwhile, with

her own. And never did any human being look another straighter in the face, or with a more unfaltering and straightforward expression, than did Victoria Elwood, at all times.

"It's not my fault," she said, "that I'm in a place like this. It's a pity it wounds your sensibilities; but it lies with you to alter."

"Why did you leave your husband?" asked Lord Francis.

"I told you. I told you, too, that you ought not to have allowed me to marry him. You knew all about him. He is a drunkard, a gambler, a dissipated wretch."

"Most men are subject to their little weaknesses," observed Lord Francis; "and really I don't think Elwood is much worse than the rest of the world. I know what your temper is; but can't this affair be patched up somehow?"

"If that's what you came over from London for," said Victoria Elwood, "you might have stayed there."

And she took a fresh cigarette and lighted it; Lord Francis knew the action perfectly, and that it was the symptom of an access of passion.

"Don't get in a rage yet, Victoria," he said. "Let us talk about things first. You can storm by yourself when I'm gone. If you gave Elwood a taste of your temper in earnest, I'm afraid it will be a hard matter to set things straight; that's my worst fear. Is he to be found at home?"

"There isn't a home," said Mrs Elwood laconically. "Everything's sold. He's gone to Australia, and I'm living on my rings, for he left me without a farthing. It's a good thing you came to-day, for I've only my wedding-ring left,

and they say it's unlucky to pawn that."

Lord Francis, who had now taken a chair, sat still and silent, gazing at her without speaking. Evidently, the reality of the case exceeded even his worst anticipations.

"I've no money for you," said he, presently, in a tone that carried conviction with it.

"Then you must arrange for me somehow," said the lady. "You know the consequences if you don't."

Lord Francis winced at this, in spite of his great self-control, and Mrs Elwood seeing the wince, smiled with pleasure. Her smile, when she was pleased in this way, was not a pleasant one to see, although, when she chose, her mouth could wear a very sweet expression.

"You can't do me much harm now,"

said Lord Francis. "I am too old a man for scandal to be of much importance."

Victoria Elwood looked at him with disdain and amusement.

"I should not be surprised," she said, eyeing him curiously as she spoke, "if you were to marry a rich woman now you are free."

Lord Francis glanced quickly at her face.

"What on earth put that into your head?" he asked.

"Oh—your general appearance," was the reply.

"I'll think it over," said Lord Francis. "It's not a bad idea. And if you stand in my way you'll repent it."

"I shall not stand in your way as long as you provide for me," was the steady answer.

There was only one person in this

world that Victoria Elwood was afraid of, and that was the man she was now addressing. She was perfectly exhausted always after an interview with him, for she had to screw her courage to the sticking-point and keep it there. But in him, and her hold over him, lay her one chance of what she valued most on earth, what she was determined to have at any cost — ease and comfort. Therefore she never showed her fear, cost her what it might.

“But,” she went on slowly, the quivering of her long eyelashes showing the suppressed excitement which shook her, “if you break your promise to my mother, if you fail in your duty to me, I swear I will make your life a burden to you.”

“Scenes like this are not agreeable, my dear Victoria,” said Lord Francis in his

coldest and most courtly tone. "We understand our bargain on both sides, I believe? On condition that you never mention a certain subject to any living soul, I will look after you. But I do honestly think I might consider I had finished with you when I had seen you married and settled. If you want me to do anything more for you, you must give me those letters."

Victoria Elwood's eyes flashed like fire.

"Indeed, no!" she said. "Don't hope for that, the terms are the same as ever. I know you too well to part with those letters till I die. If I had no hold over you, you would let me die in the street."

There was a pause. Lord Francis knew perfectly that it was useless to say more on this subject.

"I haven't an idea what to do with

you, that's the worst of it," he said presently, in genuine perplexity.

"I know it's rather difficult," said Mrs Elwood, with a smile. She lit another cigarette, and leaned back in her chair with an air which said, "Thank goodness, it's your responsibility and not mine."

"If you only had any talent," he went on, looking at her with a most disparaging expression, "a gift for singing, or the stage, like—" he stopped suddenly.

"No," said Mrs Elwood quietly, shaking her head with great precision. "I have no such gifts."

"I believe I have an idea" said Lord Francis, not attending to her remark, but following his own thoughts; "yes, I think I can arrange for you; but only if you are capable of absolute silence on the one subject."

"I think I have proved that," said Mrs Elwood.

"Yes, but you will be sorely tempted. And that, you remember, is the condition."

"Trust me," she answered. "It's a matter of business with me. So long as you keep your part of the compact I keep mine, whatever else may happen."

"Very well. Now I will explain to you. Marguerite Vane is dead, as perhaps you know."

"Lady Francis Ellerton," said Mrs Elwood with a sneer. "Well?"

"She has left an only daughter, who is going on the stage. I want a lady to live with her."

Victoria Elwood put down her cigarette, leaned forward and stared at him, her eyes dilated with sudden excitement.

"*Your daughter!*" she said; "to live with your daughter!"

“Yes, with Juliet Vane. She is a lovely girl, and very sweet. You would simply have to dress well, behave properly, keep your temper in order, and be always with her.”

“A lovely girl and very sweet!” repeated Victoria in a low voice, still watching him.

“You had better pass as a widow. I suppose that husband of yours is not likely to turn up again?”

“He’ll never trouble *me* any more,” said Mrs Elwood in a tone of profound conviction.

“Then dress as a widow; it looks a great deal better from the social point of view. Now, I’ll arrange this, and give you a little money to get your dress with, if you’ll undertake to fulfil the duties. You will simply have to be chaperon and companion. You know what that means. I intend Juliet to marry well, therefore, she must

never be seen about alone, now that she is on the stage. You will have to keep your temper, as I have said, and cultivate the art of politeness."

"Which means hypocrisy," said Mrs Elwood. "So Juliet Vane is a lovely girl, very sweet, and you intend her to marry well! And you propose I should be her companion! Great Heavens!"

"It's the only suggestion I have to make," said Sir Francis, taking up his hat. "Think it over and decide. Don't forget that I saw *you* well married."

"To a drunken scoundrel," said Mrs Elwood passionately.

"Oh, well," said Lord Francis, "most men drink now-a-days. It's not one of my vices, and I think it particularly bad form, and altogether detestable; but it doesn't prevent a man being a good match, provided he has plenty of money,

like Elwood. I certainly shall not trouble my head whether Juliet's future husband drinks or not. And she's a sensible girl ; she won't come back on my hands like a bad shilling, as you have done. Good-bye. You can write your decision to my hotel."

"No—" said Mrs Elwood. "I've made my decision. I'll be your charming Juliet's humble companion."

"And fulfil the conditions?"

"And fulfil the conditions."

"All right ; then that's settled. I'll manage it all."

"Don't forget to send me a cheque for my dress."

"You shall have it to-day. Go to one of the best dressmakers in Paris and get dressed as a widow. You look a great deal better when properly equipped."

So saying he departed, without any further farewell. She sat listening to his

steps on the stair; and then, when these had passed away, repeated to herself. "You look a great deal better when properly equipped." A moment later she repeated in the same tone, "Juliet is a lovely girl, and very sweet—I intend her to marry well—oh, of course!" She burst out suddenly in a voice of rage. "He'll marry his beautiful Juliet to a duke, I've no doubt—oh, the infamous injustice of life! Just because he did not marry my mother, the scoundrel, he treats me like this! While Juliet Vane, because her mother was a clever woman, is to have every care and every chance! A companion, indeed, a chaperon! What sort of companions and chaperons has he given me?"

She began to pace up and down the room, like a caged animal, wild with the force of her impotent rage.

Victoria was the child of a Spanish

danseuse, who had been the one real passion of Lord Francis' life. She could please and amuse him when no one else could ; and when he tired of Marguerite, he returned to her. But she had sprung from the *canaille*, and with her wit and brilliance was mingled that terrible brutality and coarse temper which too often characterises women of her class. She could fill him with excitement and delight, or make him shudder with horror. But, then, she never intruded on his own life ; he came out of it to spend hours with her, and as soon as she horrified him, returned to it again and forgot her. In her child he saw only the brutality and coarseness, and he hated her as he would probably have hated her mother in time if he had actually lived with her. Moreover, Victoria pursued and haunted him like an avenging fiend. For her soul was embittered by a constant sense of injustice. She had been educated among people who

made her feel that her illegitimacy was a curse and a disgrace ; and longed to revenge herself on the man who had brought it on her. She had the power to do so, and would have done so long ago, but that she was wise enough to prefer an easy life even to the luxury of revenge.

While Lord Francis was thus engaged in finding a companion for Juliet, some odd things were happening to Juliet herself.

CHAPTER V.

JULIET'S LIFE BEGINS.

THE day that Lord Francis went over to Paris, Heywood called at his house in the afternoon, and found he had just gone. He had come to talk to him about Juliet and her contract, having a fresh arrangement to propose before it was finally signed. When he found that Lord Francis was out of town, probably for a week, he fell into a profound reverie, which lasted all the time that he walked the length of Piccadilly. Any one knowing him well could have guessed that some great idea was forming itself in his mind, by the queer workings of his grotesque face, and the glitter in his pale-blue eyes. When he arrived at Piccadilly Circus, instead

of walking on to his theatre, which was within a stone's throw, and where one or two unfortunate persons with whom he had made appointments were waiting to see him, he got into a hansom, and told the driver to take him to Putney Hill. Such are the ways of theatrical managers.

Juliet Vane was reading, in the quiet, shaded drawing-room, when this unexpected visitor arrived. She received her manager with the quiet dignity of a young chatelaine receiving a business caller. This manner of hers rather disconcerted Heywood always, but he did not show it; put on his mettle, he appeared at his best. He could not seem a gentleman, or anything even resembling that precious article; and he had sense enough not to attempt it with her. But Juliet's unconsciously-fine air prevented his addressing her as "my dear," or indulging in any of the various familiarities of speech which

are universally allowed to be the privilege of a theatrical manager.

"I wanted to see Lord Francis," he said, "and have been to his house ; but it appears he has gone to Paris for a week."

"Yes," said Juliet ; "I have just had a note from him."

"It is very unfortunate," went on Heywood. "I have had a telegram asking me to give the new piece for a week at Portsmouth. It would be a good thing to do, for it would get the company into working order. But, of course, we can't do anything without you, and your contract is not signed yet."

"But Lord Francis will be back in a few days," said Juliet, not yet seeing any necessity for feeling interested in Mr Heywood's information.

"Ah, but I have to wire my answer at once ; and we must all go down to-morrow

afternoon, to play in the evening. Another company has broken its engagement, through the illness of the star, that's why it's so hurried."

"*To-morrow!*" exclaimed Juliet, interested at last.

"Yes; what's to be done? Do you know where Lord Francis is? Can I telegraph to him? Or will you take the responsibility yourself of deciding to come with us? Of course, I shall refuse to take the offer unless you come."

"And you would rather accept it?"

"Oh, certainly, because, as I say, it would get the company into working order. And it will not cost much. You need not bring anyone with you, as there are the other two ladies. For one week like that it will be best for you three to stay in the same house. Miss Luton is used to life on tour, and will arrange everything

for you, as you are new to it. I'll speak to her about it, if you'll come."

"Thank you," said Juliet; "but I think I had better take Graham."

"Better not," said Heywood; "she will be dreadfully in the way, and an additional expense. The dressing is not a matter of importance for a week in the country; you ladies must help each other. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, I will come, of course," said Juliet. "I am sure Lord Francis would wish me to, as you say it would be a good thing to do."

"That's all right," said Heywood, with an air as if much relieved. He rose to go. "I will write you the time of the train, to-night. It will be in the afternoon. And don't bring Graham."

"You prefer me not to?"

"Yes, really. This is only a little trial

trip, which can be a sort of holiday; and maids are always a nuisance."

"Very well," assented Juliet, though failing to see the argument. She did not like to be too determined, as she was so entirely new to the life and its details; but she would much have liked to have an old servant like Mrs Graham with her, when among these novel surroundings. However, this was a trifling matter, for so short a time. She had inherited so much of the real love of the work, that when put to it she was quite willing to suffer an inconvenience for its sake.

As soon as Heywood had bowed himself out, with a great many expressions of gratitude for her complaisance, she called Mrs Graham. She felt some inward excitement at the thought that, in so short a time, she would make her first appearance in public, even though only at a provincial town. And she

wanted to express this to someone. Graham, as ever, was at hand, in her prim, dark dress, with her quiet manner, but her face all alight with sympathy.

“To-morrow night, Graham!—positively, to-morrow night! I shall be on a real stage, and make my first appearance. Oh, my darling mother, how I wish she could be with me!” Heywood would hardly have known her.

“Well, you’ve got dresses that’ll do very well for a country town; two evening dresses, and two walking dresses, and a tea-gown to die in—that’s what you’ll want. As you must wear colours on the stage, your old dresses will do nicely. I’ll go and begin getting ready, and tell the girls I shall be away a week with you. They’re sure to be up to some nonsense! Hadn’t we better lock the house up?”

“Oh, but, Graham, I’m to go alone. Mr

Heywood wishes it—I suppose to save money, for papa says he is very mean. I am to live with Miss Luton.”

“Mr Heywood wishes it!” repeated Mrs Graham in a tone of surprise. “That’s a funny idea, for a lady like you, and a star actress, as you are and must be, from the minute you’re seen, like your mother was before you. And have you arranged it so, Miss, really?”

“Yes; really, Graham, I don’t like the idea, but Mr Heywood seemed so much to wish it that I gave way. Of course, one must give way to one’s manager!”

And Juliet, with the inborn instinct of an actress, ran to a Psyche mirror that stood in her room, and began practising her poses as “Evangeline.” Mrs Graham began her own arrangements, ruminating the while very seriously. She did not all like her “young lady” going off

like this, out of her care, when Lord Francis was away. And she had a profound distrust of Arthur Heywood. Still, she had no excuse to interfere, and there was no actual fault to be found with the arrangements. If Juliet lived with Miss Luton, she would be well cared for, and there was really no necessity for anyone else to go with her. Graham, having attended all the rehearsals, knew Miss Luton quite well by sight, and knew that she was a lady; besides, she had kept up her acquaintance with stage life by reading the daily papers, and understood perfectly well "who was who." At the same time, it would have seemed more natural for "her lady" to have had her own maid with her, and she felt sure Lord Francis would have insisted on it. But she had been too well trained to speak when it was useless, so she said nothing further.

In the morning a letter came from Heywood, simply giving the time of the train—five o'clock—and by mid-day all was ready. Juliet's trunks were packed, and she herself, sure of her "words," was wandering about the garden, going over the impassioned scenes with flushed cheeks and bright eyes. Perhaps if Marguerite could have seen her then, she would have been glad to see the apathy of grief and the weariness of a lonely life replaced by excitement, even though it were the excitement of the stage, that life she had always so dreaded for her child.

The afternoon passed. Juliet drank a cup of tea, and found, to her surprise, that her throat was parched. The cab came to the door, her boxes were placed on it, and off she started, to read the first page of theatrical life. Graham went with her to see her off.

They expected to find Heywood and all the company at the station, but no one was there, except a boy from the theatre, who was waiting for them. Directly he saw Juliet, he came to her, and gave her a letter, and then hurried away. Juliet opened the envelope in wonder. It contained a hastily-scrawled line from Heywood.

“Miss Luton gone down by an earlier train; take your ticket and go on. At Portsmouth, go to the Royal Hotel, and ask for her. You stay there with her to-night, and she will find rooms to-morrow.”

Juliet showed the note to Graham, who merely said,—

“Well, Miss, it's a good thing we have plenty of money with us for the ticket. He might have sent you a telegram this morning, I think.”

There was but just time to see to every-

thing, and for Juliet to get into the train, and when it moved off, and she looked at Graham left on the platform, she felt very lonely. It would have been pleasanter and easier if everyone had been there, and started together.

Mrs Graham watched the train out of the station, and then went slowly on her way to find a Putney omnibus. In the street, on some hoardings, there were a number of theatre bills posted which caught her eye. She paused to look at them, out of mere habit. The bill of the "Queen's," Heywood's theatre, was there with the rest, and she looked the list of names up and down, thinking of the day when she would see "Juliet Vane" in large letters at the head. Suddenly she saw something, understood something, which made her heart stop beating and her blood turn to ice, as it seemed. She knew perfectly who of

the company then playing at the "Queen's" were in the new piece, and Juliet had told her all that Heywood had said. How, then, was it, she asked herself, that these same actors and actresses were in to-night's bill at the London theatre? There was Miss Luton's name, and the name of the *jeune premier*, Maurice Denvil, and others besides. Was there some awful mistake? She stood gazing at the bill for some moments, unable to understand what she saw. Heywood's name was not in the bill, but she remembered that he did not play in this piece. Still, he was in town: his letter, though it actually did not state it as a fact, gave the idea that he was not going down to Portsmouth till later. Mrs Graham resolved to go off to the theatre and see him, and find out whether there was any mistake. And, having thus resolved, she started off as quickly as pos-

sible. "Oh!" she thought to herself, "if my dear young lady finds something wrong, and is there all alone! But what *can* be wrong? It isn't possible there can be any thing." And yet her heart misgave her and she trembled as she hurried along.

CHAPTER VI.

“Sad with delight and sweet with dread.”

At the stage door she found that all-powerful person, its keeper, lounging idly as if he were in the enjoyment of a holiday.

“Is Mr Heywood in his room?” she asked.

“He’s not in town,” said the man, with an expression of contentment, which showed that Heywood was not one of the men who are loved by their subordinates.

“Not in town!” she exclaimed, completely surprised at this answer. “You must be mistaken. He sent a note to Miss Vane half an hour ago, from here.”

“I don’t know anything about any notes.” said the man. “I know Mr Heywood went

out of town this morning, and may be gone a day or two—thank goodness.”

Mrs Graham stood still in amazement, blocking up the narrow entrance. Some one behind her said, “Will you allow me to pass?” She stood back, and Maurice Denvil came in.

“Oh, sir!” she exclaimed, “how is it you are not at Portsmouth?”

Maurice Denvil turned, and stared at her, apparently under the impression that she must be mad. He had not the slightest idea who she was at first; but after a moment her face struck him as familiar, and he remembered having seen her sitting in a corner at the rehearsals.

“I don’t understand you,” he said; “I never had any idea of going to Portsmouth. What do you mean?”

“But the company for the new play

—for ‘Evangeline,’ they are all gone, but you, sir, surely?”

“No, indeed,” he answered; “they are all in town, I can tell you for a fact. I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Mrs Graham turned deadly white, and looked ready to faint. All she could say was, “Oh, my poor young lady—what can it mean?”

“Is it something about Miss Vane?” asked Maurice Denvil. “Can I help you—or her?” The “her,” was added timidly and eagerly, and Mrs Graham’s quick ear detected it. But she looked in his face, and met a pair of charmingly frank, pleasant grey-blue eyes, with a smile in them, and a softness that made them look like wet violets. Maurice Denvil had many personal advantages, but if he had possessed none but his eyes, he would still have won all the women’s hearts. Mrs Graham yielded

to their charm. She felt it was absolutely necessary to talk to somebody, and she was certain she might trust the face she looked at.

"I don't know, sir," she said hesitatingly, with a glance at the stage door-keeper. She did not feel inclined to take him into her confidence.

"Come up into my dressing-room," said Maurice Denvil, "and tell me all about it."

He was very eager now, for Juliet's Vane's beauty had fired his heart from the first moment he had seen her. It was fated to fire many another heart, when she was before the public; but few are born who are capable of experiencing the emotions which shook Maurice when he first saw her. It was as though he had never lived until that moment. For various reasons he had kept his distance, and not allowed his passionate admiration to exhibit itself in

any way that she could recognise. But he trembled with excitement at the thought that, perhaps, an opportunity had come which might give him the privilege of her friendship. But this pleasant excitement gave place to a feeling of alarm which banished the pleasure, as he listened to what Mrs Graham had to tell. His face grew ominously grave.

“And she will arrive alone there,” he said, in a low tone. “She will be at the mercy of that scoundrel !”

“Do you suppose he is there ?” said Mrs Graham.

“Of course he is ; she will find him at the Royal Hotel. Heywood is capable of anything !”

“But my young lady has a spirit of her own, sir ; she can take care of herself.”

“No doubt,” said Maurice Denvil ; “and under any ordinary circumstances you might

trust to that. But let me tell you, that no power on earth can protect her from that man's tongue, when once she has been placed in such a false position. He can say anything he likes. I suppose his aim must be black-mail, though I should scarcely have thought that of him."

"Oh, I never thought of that!" cried Mrs Graham, starting up as if she had been shot. "What must I do?"

"Follow her by the next train," said Maurice Denvil.

"Of course—yes, yes; you're right, sir. I wonder when there's a train!"

"They've a Bradshaw in the office downstairs," said Denvil; "I'll find out for you," and he was gone instantly.

Mrs Graham paced up and down the room impatiently.

"In half-an-hour," said Maurice Denvil, as he came in at the door; he had been

turning the pages as he came upstairs.

"You can get a train in half-an-hour."

"Oh, but I must go home first!" exclaimed Mrs Graham; "I have no money! Miss Juliet didn't expect to have to buy her own ticket, and it took all we had between us."

"I can give you the money," was the answer. "Don't let anything keep you. And bring her back to town to-night."

"I'll do it, sir; trust me. How thankful I am I met you!"

"Better take enough money to bring you both back," said Denvil, thanking Providence mentally that for once in a way he happened to be "flush." He gave it her, and she took it, thanking Providence also. "I'll go down with you and see you into a cab," he said. "Merciful powers! if I were Lord Francis I'd break every bone in that man's body."

"I don't doubt his lordship'll find a way to make things even," said Mrs Graham drily.

"He can't be in love with her?" speculated Denvil; he spoke in a low tone, for they were hurrying down the narrow stairway now. "Somehow, I can't imagine that."

"Mr Arthur Heywood was never in love with anything but his own pocket," said Mrs Graham, with conviction; "and never will be."

"Ah, you know him, then!"

"Of old, sir; when he was a young man, and I was Miss Marguerite Vane's dresser."

"I'm glad of that," said Denvil. "You'll know how to deal with him."

Mrs Graham made no answer to this, for they were in the street; but her silence, and a certain grim look in her face, was

quite as satisfactory as any speech could have been.

In another moment she was in a cab, driving off for the station.

Maurice Denvil walked back to the theatre, went upstairs, shut himself in his dressing-room, locked the door, and then sat down to think. He had made a discovery which had rather taken his breath away. The thought of any danger threatening Juliet Vane had revealed it to him in all its fulness in a moment of time. She was dearer to him than anything in the world. He had known before that her beauty was a ceaseless delight to his eyes; that the magnetism of her presence made his pulses throb wildly; that to touch her hand, to hold her in his arms—as he had to in “*Evangeline*”—made his head swim as though a mortal faintness were upon him. He had thought it was

passion, that feeling roused by a woman's beauty, and which a man can conquer and put aside, if he choose, or revel in. But, no; he knew now; it was love, the fatal creature, bitter-sweet. Already he was tasting the agony that goes even hand in hand with the joy of love. What, if she should suffer—what, if she *was* suffering—and he not there to help or protect her. She, the most beautiful, the most precious thing in all the wide world. What a stab the thought of such a possibility gave him! He clutched his hands as he thought of Heywood, and knew that he was capable of murdering any creature who wronged or injured Juliet. He found himself lost in depths of feeling that he had never known he possessed. He had simulated them on the stage, but had never had any knowledge of their reality till now. What an awakening this is, when

the emotions are first roused. There are many persons who go down into the grave never knowing aught of that awful blended agony and delight. Maurice was not doomed to be one of these; though he might have been if he had never met Juliet Vane. For Juliet possessed the gift which singles a woman out of the crowd of women; the gift of inspiring love mingled with passion, according to the power and depth of the nature she touched. Terrible gift!—for while it brings love from one, perhaps two persons—love, the one great joy of life—yet it brings also the hatred of the thousands who are disappointed or envious.

“Love was made to madden and plague us;
Fresh as the flowers of the river-bed;
Sharp as the sword that's dipt in Tagus;
Sad with delight and sweet with dread.”

CHAPTER VII.

JULIET'S FIRST LOVER.

JULIET'S journey was a very quiet and easy one. She was in an express train, which carried her quickly, as she thought, to a new excitement. And so it did, but not to the kind of excitement she expected.

All the way she sat still and silent. Under her breath she was repeating the words she was to speak aloud in the evening, as she supposed. In her imagination she rehearsed the poses, the attitudes, the "business" of her part. She had one or two awful fits of stage fright, in which she felt that the only possible course open to her was to disappear directly she arrived at Portsmouth, and never

allow any one to know where she was again, in order to avoid the dreadful ordeal of her first night on the stage. She was of a very excitable and nervous temperament, and a fit of stage fright was, with her, a keen suffering. When she arrived at Portsmouth, her principal idea was that she would be late—another form of the terror malady, which all beginners on the stage have to experience, unless they are born without nerves. She glanced at the station clock—the train was a little late, and it seemed to her she had really not enough time to get to the Royal, find Miss Luton, go on to the theatre, unpack her trunks, dress, and all. Sincerely did she regret that she had not followed her own wishes and brought Graham, for with that well-trained aide-de-camp to help her, she would have felt safe. But now she was

a little unnerved. In this humour she drove off to the Royal, with her trunks on the top of her cab. Arrived there she told the cabman not to take the trunks down, but wait for orders; her idea being to go straight on with them to the theatre as soon as she had spoken to Miss Luton. She entered the hotel, and asked the porter at the door if Miss Luton was there? He went and called a waiter, who, coming forward, asked Juliet to follow him upstairs. She did so, and found herself in a sitting-room. Supper was laid on the table, but no one was there. She walked impatiently up and down the room, longing to go on to the theatre. At last the door opened and Heywood came in. She was a little surprised to see him instead of Miss Luton, but not at all startled. It was only natural he should be there.

"Let me go on to the theatre, Mr Heywood," she said. "If Miss Luton knows I am come, I need not wait to speak to her now, need I? I am so afraid of being late."

"You needn't be afraid of that, my dear," said Heywood; "there's no necessity whatever. Plenty of time!"

He had never used the customary theatrical familiarity of address to her before, and she was more startled by that than she need have been; for she did not know how usual it is. She turned haughtily to the door, saying,—

"I will send a message to Miss Luton, and go on to the theatre."

But when she reached the door she found it was locked and the key gone. Heywood was a master in "business" of this sort, and had put the key in his pocket, without her being in the least

aware of it. She faced him, pale with passion.

“Open the door, if you please, Mr Heywood, and let me go.”

“Not so quick, if you please, young lady. Come and have a glass of wine after your journey, and I will tell you why I have kept you a prisoner like this.”

Juliet was utterly puzzled by his words and manner. She was too ignorant of the world to jump at such conclusions as Maurice Denvil and Mrs Graham immediately drew from the circumstances. But the situation was exceedingly unpleasant, and Heywood's manner struck her as extremely odd—there was a kind of gloating triumph in it which puzzled her. Her first mood of indignant anger gave place to one of wonder—was he drunk—or mad? and then suddenly she remembered that she had often heard Heywood was mad,

and her heart stood still with fear. Had one of his mad fits come on? Oh, where was Miss Luton? Why did they leave her shut up alone with this madman? But her courage came back in a moment, for she was naturally of a fearless temperament. Very soon someone would come, for the play could not begin without herself and Heywood, who played the two principal parts. Reassured by this recollection, she determined not to allow him even to fancy that she felt any alarm.

Heywood went to the table and poured out two glasses of wine. One he held out to her.

“Come, my dear, take it, and eat a sandwich. You must want something after your journey.”

Juliet was, in fact, very thirsty and exhausted; and as she did not intend to show that she thought anything was wrong,

she concluded that her best course would be to take the wine and drink it. She therefore approached the table, and taking the wine glass, said "Thank you," and put it to her lips. But she had no sooner done so than she put it down.

"There's something wrong with that wine," she said. "What a queer taste!"

"Is there?" said Heywood. "Oh, no, I think it's your fancy, the wine here is considered very good. Drink it, my dear."

She looked at him and met the keen glitter of his pale eyes, which seemed full of secret amusement and delight. She regarded him steadily and he looked down. She noticed that he only touched the wine with his lips in spite of his praises of it. Her ears were strained in the hope of footsteps coming to the door, but there was not a sound.

"Has Miss Luton gone on to the theatre?" she asked.

Heywood looked up at her, and laughed.

"She isn't down here at all," he said.

"Not down here! where is she then? Where are the others?"

"Well, the arrangements fell through, and none of them have come down."

Juliet crossed the room and rang the bell.

"What's that for?" asked Heywood.

"To tell them to take my luggage back to the station. Please to unlock the door, Mr Heywood?"

She looked straight at him as she said this. Either her resolute manner conquered him for the moment, or he really did not wish to create a scene in the hotel. Heywood's mind was too obscure and cunning for any one to fathom its intricacies. At all events, he unlocked the door before the waiter came.

"There is a cab waiting for me," said Juliet. "Will you please tell the man I am going back to town by the next train?"

"Yes, Miss," said the waiter. "There's no up train till midnight, I suppose you know?"

"Till midnight!" echoed Juliet.

"Just time to have a nice supper and a chat," said Heywood. "Tell the man to put the trunks in the cloak-room at the station, and bring back the tickets."

The waiter departed on his errand.

Juliet did not interfere. She did not know of any better course to suggest, or what else to do. But, a moment later, she concluded it would be best to go to the station and wait there. She rose and crossed to the door.

"I'll go in the cab," she said. "Good-night, Mr Heywood."

With the quickness of a conjuror, Heywood had passed in front of her, locked the door again, and put the key in his pocket.

Juliet stood still in alarm. She was beginning to feel a terror of this man.

"Come and sit down, and have a little quiet talk," he said.

Juliet looked at him very earnestly, disguising completely the terror that she felt.

"I have no objection to sitting down and talking to you, Mr Heywood," she said, "provided you open that door. But I do not choose to be a prisoner."

"If I unlock it, you'll promise to stay quietly and hear all I have to say—even if it makes you angry?"

"Yes, I'll hear all you have to say, if I know that I am free to leave you when I choose."

Heywood unlocked the door immediately.

He then returned to where Juliet stood, and, putting his hand on her arm, said—

“Sit down, my dear, I’ve a great deal to say.”

Juliet, her eyes fixed on his, did not care to resent the familiarities, but sat quietly down without any sign of doubt or alarm. She thought this was her best course, for she was now quite convinced that the man was mad. With the door unlocked, there was the chance of escape should an opportunity occur. This was her hope — that something would distract his attention from her, and she could fly from the room.

He sat down in a chair opposite her, and fixed a regard upon her which he intended to express profound admiration.

“You must know,” he said, “as well as I do, that all the men that see you fall in love with you. When you have made

a public appearance, you will have all London at your feet. You must forgive me, then, if your beauty has driven me to take such a desperate step as this. I *can't* run the risk of losing you. I'm not as young as I once was, nor as handsome as some men, and I should die of jealousy if I saw someone younger and better looking winning your favour. But, my dear, I'm not one of the common sort—I'm not one of those fellows the papers write about, who betray girls and ill-use them. I'm not a manager like that. No, my dear, it's all fair and square with me. I'm going to marry you."

No convulsion of nature, no thunderbolt descending at her feet from heaven, could have astonished Juliet so much as this speech. She was so amazed that she sat silently regarding the man who made it. He smiled complacently.

"I don't wonder you're surprised, my dear," he observed; "but then your father's a great friend of mine. You'll have nothing to complain of. I will make you the first actress in the world; your husband will be the most successful manager. What could you wish for more?"

Juliet rose up like a queen. All her fears were lost sight of, even forgotten, in her utter scorn of the creature before her. And in her indignation she said in derision what she had seriously thought but a few minutes ago.

"You must be mad, Mr Heywood."

Heywood laughed. "Some people say I am, you know," was his answer.

Juliet advanced to the door. "I have heard enough," she said; "good-night."

Heywood turned on his chair and looked at her. "Juliet Vane," he said in a very

low voice. There was something so ominous in its sound that Juliet involuntarily stopped and looked back at him. He had drawn a pistol from his pocket, and it was directed straight at her. He went on speaking in the same low tone of voice, which was much more alarming than a shout would have been.

“I don’t know if I am mad or not, but I do know I am a dead shot, and I assure you, you will not leave this room alive, if you try to go now.”

This was a strong measure, which Heywood had not in the least intended to use. He did it on the spur of the moment. But he had to deal with a person of as great determination as himself, and he saw clearly that if he did not get some advantage over her, she would be gone in another second. Now Juliet did not want to die; a young

and lovely woman, just at the beginning of an exciting career, naturally does not; and a pistol aimed straight at you by a person whom you suspect to be mad, is not a pleasant thing to face. His answer to her thoughtless remark brought back the awful dread that he really was mad. She had heard from her father that Heywood was a dead shot; she knew his boast was not an idle one. She had reached the centre of the room (which was a large one) when he checked her; it was unnecessary to look round in order to assure herself that she was out of reach of the bell and of the door both. She had turned to look at Heywood when he spoke, and kept her eyes on his face. Her mind worked quickly as she stood there a moment, saying nothing. It seemed absurd that a man like Heywood, a prosperous manager,

should care to run the certain penalty of shooting at her, here in this hotel, where, the shot heard, the room would be instantly full of people; but then—if he was mad!

After a moment she had got her voice under control, and spoke quietly.

“What do you want with me, Mr Heywood?”

“Haven’t I told you?” he answered, without moving, and in the same low voice, which had something of the growl of an animal in it. “Come back and sit down quietly. I want some supper, and I want to look at you and talk to you. I’ll make it all right. I have a special licence in my pocket, and we’ll be married to-morrow morning early. You can’t do anything; none of the company are down here; not a soul that knows you, or would believe your story if you told it. Any

fuss you might attempt to make would only add tenfold to the scandal. I don't want my wife talked about more than need be. You are in my power, but I mean to do the right thing, for I'm proud of you."

"Is it possible,—" said Juliet, almost in a whisper, "that you brought me down here to trap me like this?"

"Never mind that, whether I did or no; I was determined to have my own way, and I knew it was no use asking Lord Francis, and I didn't suppose it was much use asking you. All's fair, you know, in love or war. Now take my advice, and make the best of the position with a good grace. Don't let us begin our life together with any fuss or scandal."

Sincerely did Juliet wish at that moment that she had a pistol of her own. But she had not. She could see only one plan—to

talk to him, and hope for the waiter's return to the room, then to fly from it instantly, and either escape from the hotel, or tell the landlord Heywood was mad, according to circumstances. She inclined to the former course; Heywood having told her no one knew her, made her think it would be best to leave the hotel without any explanation, if possible. But it was quite likely that the waiter had been told not to return to the room at all unless summoned. She determined to edge, imperceptibly, nearer the door, if it proved possible to get him into conversation, so that he would not notice it.

"You must know," she said, with quiet dignity, "that even if you keep me here against my will, I shall not marry you."

"I think you will," said Heywood drily.
"When you consider what will be said

about you, you won't care to go back to town except as my wife."

Juliet changed colour a little. She began to realise that this might not merely be a dreadful adventure for the moment, but that it might stain her life. The thought was unbearable to a girl of her proud temper. She lost her command over herself.

"I will not bear these insults from you," she said passionately. "I would rather die. Shoot me, if you like!"

She moved so quickly in her sudden access of indignation that Heywood, who had been put off his guard by her quiet manner, was not prepared for it. She darted to the door—and, almost instantaneously with her movement, but not quite, he fired. The shot entered the wall behind the spot where a second ago Juliet had been standing, while she was speeding down the corridors as fast as youth and strength and

terror combined could enable her. She could not get out of the hotel without explanation, for the shot had been heard, and the landlady and waiters and chambermaids were all on the stairs. So she simply went into the landlady's own inner room, where she felt tolerably safe, and sat down breathless.

"What on earth has happened?" they all asked, crowding round her.

"He is mad," said Juliet, as soon as she could speak, having by then made up her mind what to say; "he wants me to marry him, and because I won't, he tried to shoot me."

"But he told us you *were* married to him!" exclaimed the landlady; "he said he expected his wife."

Juliet shook her head.

"No, indeed," she said. "Thank Heaven for that!"

The landlady went out and spoke to her manager, who joined the servants upstairs. He cleared them out of the room, looked at the shot in the wall, came out again, and quietly turned the key in the door. Then he came back to the landlady.

“Now, Miss,” he said, “shall we send for the police? Do you want him given in charge?”

“Oh, no,” exclaimed Juliet! “Don’t make any fuss about it. Now I am safe I don’t care. Anything better than give him in charge—it would all get into the papers, then! I will go back to town to-night.”

Suddenly she remembered she had no money; and her consternation silenced her. For the first time in her life she understood the value of money. No one can know it till placed in a difficult or compromising position among strangers with empty pockets. Juliet was horror-struck at her position when

she realised that she was perfectly helpless among these people, who very likely might not believe her tale at all. She put her hand over her eyes a moment, and tried to collect her thoughts, and not hear the excited talking going on around her. But she could not help hearing it, and presently gathered one thing from it that gave her some relief. Heywood was not known there any more than herself. He was spoken of by another name, which he had evidently given on arriving. Oh, if it would only be possible to get away without anything further being known! She was puzzling her brains how best to act, when she heard some one say, "Oh, my dear young lady, what has happened!" and looking up saw Mrs Graham standing before her—welcome at that moment as an angel!

"Oh, Graham!" she exclaimed in the greatest agitation, "how glad I am you are

here ! But how did you come ? Oh, thank Heaven." She drew Graham close, and whispered to her briefly what had happened and what she wanted to do. "Have you got money, Graham ?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss ; Mr Denvil gave me plenty."

Juliet was sufficiently astonished at this answer ; but did not attempt to ask an explanation then.

At Juliet's request, the manager went and had an interview with Heywood, who seemed quite quiet and cheerful. He was drinking brandy, and laughing to himself.

The manager informed him that the lady did not wish to give him in charge, but sent him a message to say that she would leave it to her father to take any proceedings he thought fit. That, therefore, if he, Heywood, would promptly pay the bill, and pay for the damage to the wall, he was at liberty to depart. In fact, he was

requested to do so as speedily as possible, the management not being in the habit of entertaining gentlemen who played with firearms.

By the time Heywood and his portmanteau were escorted through the hall to a cab, Juliet and Mrs Graham were at the railway station. Both were nearly dead of exhaustion, and they made a dismal supper in the dreary refreshment-room, telling each other the while the strange events of the few hours during which they had been parted. Juliet was as much surprised at Maurice Denvil's kindness, and the concern he had shown, as at anything else.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW LORD FRANCIS PUNISHED HIM.

“So that is my first lover,” said Juliet bitterly. “Mama always said that on the stage lovers are the torment and misery of a woman’s life; and certainly, if this is a specimen of what they are like, she must be right.”

They were in the train travelling to London. Juliet was tired to death; but every now and then she roused herself to speak, for her mind kept travelling over the incidents of her adventure.

“I can tell you one thing, my dear Miss Juliet,” said Graham, “if it’s any comfort to you in all this wretchedness, that man Heywood may be mad, and I

daresay he is, but he's a good deal saner than most people when it comes to money and business. His conduct is the plainest proof possible that he knows you are going to be a great actress."

"How?" exclaimed Juliet. "In what way?"

"My idea—and Mr Denvil's too—was that he simply intended to get you in his power and then blackmail you and his lordship. That would have been a good stroke of business, if he had succeeded. It seemed good enough to me; but oh, that Heywood, he is wicked! You see Miss, in your position, his lordship's own daughter, and with such a career as you have before you, Heywood would have been bound to have been paid off, and not to talk about you. But Heywood's game was bigger. He is a manager, you see, Miss, and I don't think a manager is a

man—he has different feelings altogether. I see now that if Heywood had frightened you into marrying him, as he intended, his fortune would have been made for life. There would have been no contracts then, Miss, no salary to pay; and you may be sure if Heywood let you engage yourself to another manager, it would have been he would have taken the money. He'd have nothing to do but take money, in fact, if you belong to him, as you would if you were his wife. What an escape!”

“And *that* is my first lover!” said Juliet, in a still more despondent tone than she had used before.

“My dear lady used often to say to me that no plain woman, who finds it hard to make a small living by the work of her hands, can even imagine the torments, the humiliations, and sorrows heaped upon a woman who is beautiful and clever. It is

as bad as being rich. It teaches you how selfish men are—how they want whatever you have—your talent, or your money, or your beauty, just for themselves. My poor dear lady, often did she say, even when she was young, with the world before her, that if she had to live over again she would prefer to be plain and poor. I think she was right; but you can't help it if it's otherwise."

Now, Juliet's mother had never talked to her in this strain; had never allowed her child to suspect the sadness and disappointment that really lay at her heart. So that this view of her greatest gifts, as being disadvantageous rather than otherwise, was entirely new to Juliet. She sat some time silent, trying to grasp the idea. It was not a cheering one at the very outset, before she had even started on the race of life. After a little while she spoke again.

“Graham, I won’t go on the stage. It must be a dreadful life. You and I will go and live quietly in the country, in a cottage.”

“It would be happier for you, my dear; but how could you do it, if Lord Francis didn’t approve? Because you are dependent on him now.”

“Yes, that’s true,” said Juliet, falling into a fit of thought, which lasted till the train went in at the London station. It was nearly two o’clock, and the station wore a deserted, miserable air. But there was a figure standing in the midst of the desert which Mrs Graham recognised at a glance.

“This is the second lover,” she said to herself. “Quite a different sort. But if she should come to like him, he’ll make her miserable! He’s too impetuous.”

It was Maurice Denvil.

“I knew there was an up-train at this

hour, Miss Vane," he said, "so I just looked in when the theatre was over to see if you had got back safely. What an extraordinary mistake for that fellow Heywood to make!—but he is mad, you know. When I played with him in 'Evangeline' in the country he went quite out of his mind one night, and tore my coat off. When it's put on in town I must be sure and have relays of coats ready in case of such accidents! But it's too bad to put you to such trouble, and all this tiresome travelling. Make him pay for it somehow—he'll like you all the better for it. I have a cab waiting—will you take it?—it's a good horse, and will take you home in no time. I shall walk up to my club; I haven't had supper yet."

All this was said as they went down the platform, Denvil taking Juliet's rugs and carrying them for her. She was saved any explanation by his talk. "Well!" said

Mrs Graham to herself, walking a step behind, "he's got plenty of tact anyway."

The cab was close by, and Juliet, utterly weary, got gladly into it and said, "Good-night." Denvil drew Mrs Graham back a moment. "Tell me!" he said.

"He must know she's worth her weight in gold, sir," she answered. "He wanted to marry her, and had got a special licence in his pocket; when she escaped he shot at her, and it's only a miracle, it seems to me, that she's alive. Good-night, sir, I must go,"—for Juliet was leaning forward to see what detained her.

And Maurice Denvil stood petrified, looking after the retreating cab. "Oh, that it were my business to punish him!" he said to himself. "*Shall* I be able to keep my hands off him?"

Juliet and Mrs Graham drove home in

silence, too weary for further discussion on any subject.

In the morning Juliet received a letter from Lord Francis, giving an address in Paris. She immediately sent a telegram asking him to come back. Lord Francis' face, when he read it, was a study. "What on earth's the matter now?" he exclaimed. "Am I never to have any peace?" However, he quickly packed up and took the next train; first sending a message to Mrs Elwood, telling her to come over to London as soon as she was equipped.

The next afternoon he arrived at Putney Hill. He found Juliet lying on a sofa in the drawing-room. He had never seen her look so languid; she had always been the embodiment of health and brightness. But her adventure had wearied her spirit; she wanted to give up her new life, for she had lost interest in it. She roused herself,

however, to tell Lord Francis her story. He did not interrupt her once; when she had finished he uttered one exclamation, "The infernal scoundrel!" Then he began asking her questions—very practical questions. She could see that he grew more and more angry as they talked; his mouth narrowed, and his pale face looked whiter.

"God! but he shall pay for this!" he said in a low voice, when she had answered all his questions.

"What are you going to do?" she asked in some alarm. "Oh, don't get it talked about!"

"I am going to make him pay. Heywood is incapable of suffering except in his purse. If I were to horsewhip him from one end of London to the other he would not feel it so much. It shall not be talked about, I promise you. I don't intend your first notoriety to spring from an affair of this

sort, I can tell you; though I daresay Heywood does. Goodbye; I'm off. When I've settled with him you will see me again. Make your mind easy."

At the door he paused a moment, and looked back.

"I forgot to tell you," he said. "I have found a lady to live with you. She or Graham must be with you always in future."

And with that he was gone. He returned in the evening, to Juliet's surprise. She was sitting at a table doing some kind of fancy work. Lord Francis came and sat down at the table also, and laid on it a paper.

"Read that," he said, "and then I want you to sign it."

She looked at it in surprise. It was a theatrical agreement; a contract between herself and Heywood for two years. She uttered a cry of dismay at seeing this.

“Read on,” said Lord Francis.

She did so, and even her ignorance was not so profound as to preventing her uttering another cry of surprise when she came to the salary stipulated for. Her eyes opened wide. Lord Francis laughed softly.

“It was a clever trick of Heywood’s,” he said. “He played for a high stake; but he made some mistakes, and he has lost. So now he’s got to pay. Your fortune is made, my dear Juliet. You will cost him so much that he will be obliged to make it back; he will have to give you parts that suit you, and every possible advantage. Sign it quickly; I want to go back to town.”

“But, papa,” said Juliet, “I told you I don’t want to go on with the life; and with that man! Oh, it is impossible!”

“My dear girl, you are not a fool, whatever else you may be. Look at it twice, and you will see that the way to please

Heywood is to let him ruin your future. Nonsense ! Don't throw away a great opportunity like this. Walk over the reptile, and make him suffer, as he wanted to make you suffer. You've spirit enough for it, I know."

And she had. Her eye lit at the thought, for she did owe Heywood as heavy a grudge as a woman well can owe a man.

"Perhaps you are right," she said.

"You won't have any trouble with Heywood, I can tell you," said Lord Francis. "The greatest bully in the world, if he has anyone in his power, he is the veriest cur if the tables are turned. I know him, and I know how to deal with him. Of course he had put himself so completely in the wrong, that he could not hope to get off unpunished ; at the same time he tried it on with me, I can tell you. He actually told me that you went down to

meet him alone by arrangement, knowing no one else had gone down."

Juliet looked up with an inarticulate cry of rage.

"Don't trouble yourself," said Lord Francis coolly. "I am a judge of character; I know you, and I know Heywood. He is the greatest liar unhung, I believe. If you want to benefit yourself and punish him, sign that contract."

Juliet, who had pushed it away from her, drew it back, and looked at it. Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes glittered.

"I *can't* be worth all that money!" she said. Lord Francis laughed.

"Of course not," he said, "the thing is absurd. But you'll be worth every penny of it before the first year is out, for Heywood will work like a slave to get his money back. No actress ever started under such splendid auspices. All I grudge the wretch is that you *will* be worth it before he's done with

you. He went on his knees for five years instead of two. Not exactly. You shall be a duchess by then, or else have a theatre of your own."

Juliet had signed the contract while her father was talking. She laughed at his last words.

"I think I should prefer the theatre," she said.

"It might be the best," he observed, "for you can always build a theatre if you want one, whereas dukes can't be created at will, and there isn't a marriageable one at present. Now, I have to sign this magical piece of paper, and all's done. Heywood went fishing, and got himself impaled. This is how successes are made, Juliet. People will always wonder how you sprang all at once into the front place on the stage, as you will."

"There's one more thing on my mind,"

he said presently, as he was folding up the paper, and restoring it to his pocket-book. "I've shut Heywood's mouth, and he has been too much concerned for his own skin, not knowing how I should take the matter, to talk. Graham is safe; I don't like her, but she's to be trusted. But I'm not so easy about that actor, Denvil. It's a thousand pities he ever got drawn into the affair at all."

"But Graham would never have come to me but for him," said Juliet; "even if she had thought of it, she could not have gone home for money, and got down that night."

"Yes, that's true," said Lord Francis reflectively; "what I am debating in my mind is, whether to *ask* him not to talk, or trust him."

"I think," said Juliet, "you can trust him." Her colour rose a little as she spoke.

“He seemed so much concerned, surely he would never be the one to make bad worse!”

“Perhaps not—but one can never tell. Men are, in reality, worse gossips than women. The best plan will be to make a friend of him. I’ll ask him to dinner, and perhaps bring him down here on Sunday afternoon. But he’s dangerously handsome. Don’t fall in love with him, Juliet. I won’t have you marry an actor; there couldn’t be a greater mistake. However, I don’t think you are likely to fall in love in a hurry, that’s one comfort. And a week after you are on the stage, you’ll have a hundred men to choose among. I’ll write a line to Denvil to-night, and make him safe as soon as possible.”

Having thus decided, he said good-night and went away, leaving Juliet to some very confused reflections.

CHAPTER IX.

“The wine of triumph.”

“EVANGELINE” was announced. The play was to be given at a *matinée* first, and the date for this was fixed. Every paper contained paragraphs, stating that on this occasion Juliet Vane, Marguerite’s child, was to make her first appearance. That was enough to excite interest, for Marguerite’s name was still one of power. But in addition, the papers were full of bits of gossip about Juliet Vane, of her beauty, her talent, of the secluded life she had led with her mother — any and everything which could excite interest. This was Heywood’s doing. He knew all the ropes, and how to pull them; and he spared no effort for

Juliet. The clubs were full of her name; he had spent days in looking up his acquaintances in order to drop hints as to the wonderful star that was about to appear.

This is the way in which a great reputation is made, as it seems, by magic.

Juliet, spending the days quietly in her home, had no idea that every playgoer in London had seen or heard her name, that it was mentioned at every dinner-table, and in every ball-room, and that all the seats for the *matinée* might have been booked three times over.

Juliet was a little altered by her adventure with Heywood. It had taken away her nervousness. It seemed to her that, after preserving her composure in the face of that detestable man and his more detestable words, a public audience would be as nothing. Some of the fine impalpable freshness had gone from her spirit, and some of the

timidity. This is the inevitable result of an innocent creature's first experiences of the wickedness of others. Hitherto she had been a little nervous with Heywood, regarding him as a manager of experience who would criticise her crude efforts. Now, she looked upon him as a despicable creature, whose opinion was not worth a thought. It is quite sad to note, in some artistes who have been long on the stage, the profound contempt they entertain for the public they play to. They have seen so much of the worse side of life, that all human nature is cheapened in their eyes, and worthless. Juliet had taken the first step in this direction, and it had added to her courage wonderfully.

On the very day of the *matinée* Mrs Elwood arrived.

Everything had been arranged for her. Juliet had given up her own rooms to her, and taken those which Marguerite had used

in her lifetime. She had often seen Marguerite pause before the Psyche mirror in her room, and speak a few lines of one of her favourite parts. Juliet used it now for the same purpose, and loved to, for it seemed to bring her nearer to her mother.

Graham had quite agreed with Lord Francis, that a lady was necessary in the house as Juliet's companion. "You will be able to see people, then, sometimes, Miss," she said, "which will be a good thing, for you can't live shut up here like a nun always. You must make friends."

So Juliet assented, without any demur, to the arrival of this new member of the household. Lord Francis told her that he had the highest references with Mrs Elwood from friends of his in Paris, with whom she had been living in a similar capacity. Nothing could be more satisfactory; and when Victoria Elwood arrived, her winning

smile and her beautiful black eyes won Juliet's heart immediately. She took a fancy to her on the spot. Victoria assumed her most charming manner; no one could have guessed at the rage that sprang into life in her heart when she saw Juliet's beauty. Victoria was not jealous in the ordinary sense, as one pretty woman is of another. In spite of her eyes and smile, men never admired her; and when she saw a woman of the type that all men fall down and worship, the milk of human kindness turned to gall within her. For why, she asked in vain of an unlistening Omnipotence, should the Creator have been so manifestly unjust?

A brougham was at the gate for Juliet at half-past twelve; and as there was an early lunch on the table when Mrs Elwood arrived, she insisted on sitting down to it with Juliet as she was, in her travelling dress, and going on with her to the theatre. She

declared she felt no fatigue ; and, indeed, that was a sensation she never appeared to experience. So, when the brougham started, she was beside Juliet, and Mrs Graham sat opposite.

Juliet had not been to the theatre, or seen Heywood since her journey to Portsmouth, and she was rather glad to enter it thus fully escorted, so that she might seem taken up with conversation if she should chance to meet him. But he kept well out of her way. It was detestable to have to play with him in the piece, but as that could not be avoided, she resolved to think about it as little as possible.

Lord Francis had reserved a box, and into this Mrs Elwood was shown by the prompter, who met them on the stairway and told them its number.

"I daresay I'd better go, Miss Vane," said Mrs Elwood, "unless you think I

could be of use. I am afraid of being in the way when you are dressing."

Juliet looked at Mrs Graham, and reading the expression of her eyes, said,—
"Thank you very much, but Graham can do all I want, and I expect we shall be rather hurried the first time. You will be more comfortable in the front." So Mrs Elwood was shown through into the other part of the house, and into a small box, where she found herself quite alone.

"Oh, that is a relief, Miss!" said Mrs Graham. "I was so afraid she would want to stay in the dressing-room; and it is so difficult to dress anybody with people sitting about."

But there was no risk of that; Victoria Elwood intended to avoid Juliet's room while the actual business of dressing was going on, lest she should be pressed into the service and made useful.

“Evangeline” was one of those curious plays which come to the surface every now and then, of which no human being can foretell the fate. It must either be an immense success, or a grotesque failure; and none, not its author, nor the most adverse critic, could feel sure which would be the event. Evangeline herself is a lofty, other-world character, a girl who has to act up to a standard of Quixotic heroism and self-sacrifice, which might readily seem absurd and far-fetched. She has two lovers, one of whom is her guardian. He, conscious that he has age and other disadvantages against him, does not speak of his love to her, till he begins to suspect an attachment is growing between her and the other lover. He appeals to her gratitude, and her pity, and implores her not to desert him, now, when he feels an awful malady, which may at any time

affect his brain, growing upon him. At last her feelings are so harrowed that she decides to sacrifice herself for him; to become his wife, and repay the care and attention he has given her in her youth. The affair between herself and her young lover has gone further than the guardian has any idea of; and there is a painful farewell scene between them, which he overhears, and eventually interrupts. He exhibits himself as sublimely Quixotic and unselfish in his own person, and insists upon giving up Evangeline to the man she loves. In the midst of this tender scene, the madness comes suddenly upon him; he attacks the young lover, and after a horrible struggle, kills him before the very eyes of Evangeline. This is a bare outline of the emotional scenes between the three leading characters in the play. After that, it is chiefly

psychological, the weight falling on Evangeline, for her guardian is left a shattered wreck, an imbecile. Utterly sad—yet Evangeline without a brilliant actress for the title *rôle*, would have become a burlesque.

“Graham,” said Juliet, while she was dressing, “it does seem to me so odd that Heywood should play a madman when he is so nearly mad himself.”

“Oh, Miss Juliet,” said Graham, “he’s no more mad than you or I. But I feel it suits him to play the part, both on and off the stage.”

Juliet was thinking of Heywood, because now she had to meet him; her opening scene was with him. But when she went downstairs and reached the wings to stand ready for her entrance, the glimpse she got of a densely-crowded house drove every thought of Heywood out of her mind.

What a house to play to for the first time! For a moment the agony of stage-fright came upon her; her heart stood still, her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth, and, afraid of falling, she caught hold of Graham's arm for support. That old lieutenant knew very well what was the matter, and that it would pass in a moment. And so it did. The spirit of the artist rose within Juliet, proud and strong, that spirit which soars out of sight of all personalities, of all small concerns. The moment approached for her to go on; Heywood was on, and was speaking; but he was looking anxiously at the wing where Juliet stood, still grasping Graham's arm for support. Graham knew that he was consumed with anxiety, and took a malicious delight in watching him. She knew as well as he did that the *début* of many a good actress has been ruined by sheer nervous-

ness. If that happened now, what a loss it would be to him ! But Juliet Vane was not what is called a good actress ; she was a great one. Heywood knew that perfectly well, or he would not have played the desperate game he had played at Portsmouth ; and this knowledge was his one comfort, as he faced the crowded house. For it was a house which had paid, and paid well, for the privilege of seeing the new star, and would brook no nonsense. He had taken its money, and on Juliet depended everything, whether the new play was ridiculed or applauded. A house which has given its money gives no polite applause, as Heywood knew but too well. And he, though a successful manager, was not popular. It would amuse the public to laugh at him. So that altogether he was upon thorns ; yet he had confidence.

A large box had been reserved for royalty,

and a small one for Juliet's friends, in which Mrs Elwood, in her widow's weed, still sat alone. One row of stalls had been given to the newspaper critics and to a few notable people in the theatrical world. The rest of the theatre was crammed by the merciless public, and Heywood, looking from the full stalls to the packed gallery, wondered whether the washed or the unwashed would laugh the most heartily if the venture failed. To offer a new play of a doubtful nature to the public is something like offering a strange and possibly unpopular food to a cageful of lions.

Heywood fully realised all this as he stood there, delivering a soliloquy, watching the house with one eye, and the apparently fainting Juliet with the other. At last he gave her her cue, and turned his back on her, too anxious to watch what would happen.

Juliet lifted her head ; a profound quiet seemed to have fallen on her spirit. She took her hand from Graham's, and moved on to the stage immediately, apparently with the calmness of an experienced artist. She began to speak without hesitation, and Graham, watching, saw the start of relief which passed through Heywood's body as he heard her voice—soft, clear, bell-like. He turned and looked at her ; and when he saw her standing there so perfectly self-possessed under the crowd of eyes that were concentrated upon her, his one feeling was that of profound regret that he had not succeeded in frightening her, and making her his wife. For she would succeed—oh, yes ; he had no more fears. He had been on the stage all his life, and he knew the meaning of that breathless attention—that absorbed interest—the public was in love with her at first sight. She had only to

go on and win. His conviction that this was so put him at his ease with her, and their scene was well played. It was interrupted by the entrance of Evangeline's lover—played by Maurice Denvil.

A change came upon Juliet's manner, upon her face, at the sound of his voice—a change which seemed to the audience to be the most profound art. As a matter of fact, it was simple nature. She had neither seen nor heard anything of him, except what Lord Francis had said, since he parted from her that night at the station on her return from Portsmouth. In the feverish excitement of her first appearance she had forgotten even that he lived. But when she heard his voice—one of those rare voices among men, vibrating, low, with a break in it sometimes, yet with a fresh, ringing sound—a gift which had done much to win for Denvil

his position on the stage—it was as if a hand had been laid on her heart. It was well for her that the faint shudder which passed through her fitted in to her *rôle*, for she was too inexperienced to conceal it. She was but a child still, and here, on the stage, before the eyes of the world, she was passing through what most girls experience at their first dances when they leave school. A child still was Juliet Vane, but, with the glare of the world upon her, soon to be a woman.

Heywood left the stage, and Maurice Denvil approached Juliet. She had to play her first love scene. Denvil's hand trembled when he laid it on hers. Juliet looked up, and met those wonderful blue eyes, dewy, starry, shining, with a soft glow that suggested immortal youth and eternal love. In that moment the silent throng which watched her, and waited for her

words, became, for her, non-existent. She forgot them; she was unconscious of the presence of these people, these mere outsiders to the life she was living, the passion she felt. She spoke her words—she gazed into those lovely eyes, thinking of nothing else—the curtain came down, and she heard with wonder a wild roar, a thunder of applause.

“Stay,” said Maurice Denvil, looking at her with awe, with a reverend adoration—he knew not which he worshipped most, the artist or the woman—“you will have to go before the curtain.”

And she had—there was no peace possible until she appeared. She looked round the house with a bewildered glance—it was all visible to her now, and it seemed so strange to think that all these people had actually been so near her during the last few delicious moments. She recognised

royalty, close to the stage, and very enthusiastic—that startled her a little, and as she moved across, was startled again by a group of faces leaning towards her out of another box. Lord Francis was there, and Mrs Elwood, and with them two gentlemen who gave her the same adoring look she had so recently received from Maurice Denvil.

The applause thundered on till she disappeared and then it died slowly away. The die was cast. Juliet had won her public; after this, success was certain. And people thought of her as a woman who might make the world her football.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER LOVER.

THERE was silence for a moment or two in the box where Mrs Elwood and Lord Francis sat, though the rest of the house was already chattering, after the manner of first-night audiences. Lord Francis was deep in his own thoughts, contrasting and comparing Juliet with her mother; and, at the same time watching the people in the stalls as they leaned across and talked to each other. Pleased surprise, enthusiasm, were written on the different faces. Mrs Elwood drew back, after a long glance round the house, and sat very quietly in the shelter of one of the curtains; her eyes fixed on Lord

Francis. She was trying to read his thoughts.

The other two inmates of the box seemed also lost in thought, or memory, or something equally absorbing.

And it was Juliet's image which filled the mind of every one of the group.

Presently one of the men raised himself and got up.

"She's splendid!" he said laconically; "simply splendid! I'll be back in a few minutes." With which he took his departure.

He was an old man with a remarkable appearance of youth about him. Perfectly preserved and appointed, he kept age at bay. His long moustachios were silky, and but faintly touched with grey. He was dressed in the latest mode—entirely in silver grey; and his perfectly fitting frock coat looked as well on him as on

any of the boys who belonged to the order of the gilded youth. He carried a *pince-nez*, heavily mounted in gold, which it was said was only put on to ogle pretty women with.

This was Dr Pynton Clifford, one of the most fashionable and most successful doctors of the day. It was a matter of pride with him, in whatever assembly or gathering he might appear, to be seen talking to the prettiest woman present.

"You're half asleep, I believe, Manner-ing," said Lord Francis, turning to the other man, who sat silent and immovable.

"Not exactly," was the reply, in a low voice.

"I'm going round to a box opposite. Are you going to stay with Mrs Elwood?"

"I should like to," answered the young man. And Lord Francis left the box

Mrs Elwood turned her frank, straightforward gaze upon Mannering's face.

"I suppose," she said; "you are in love with her at first sight, like all the rest of the men. How men do run after an actress!"

"That's just what I was thinking," said Mannering, evading the first part of the speech; "wondering what she will be like in ten years, if some one doesn't save her from this life!"

"I've no doubt somebody will save her," said Mrs Elwood, sarcastically; "and if not, in ten years she will be all right. She will have found out that men are hypocrites and liars; that for a man to fall in love is the same as for a child to have the measles—sharp at the time, no doubt, but soon over, and recovery pretty certain. She will have become a woman of the world, and use men to her own ends."

"You are very cynical," said Lord Mannering, looking at her with curiosity.

"No, I only state facts," said Mrs Elwood. "You know perfectly well that life is like that. Men make women bad, and then turn on them; and the women revenge themselves as effectually as they can, and quite right too. What else is left for a woman, when faith and trust and belief in human nature are all stamped out of her? Oh, how I wish I could have a cigarette! I have lived so much abroad that I can't get used to the odd way English people have of looking upon a cigarette as something wicked if a woman smokes it. Surely the English are the greatest hypocrites and humbugs upon earth!"

"I don't think there can be any doubt about that," said Lord Mannering. "I'm dead sick of the country. It's in me to go

and live in the Australian bush if I get sufficiently annoyed here."

"Yes," said Mrs Elwood, contemplating him. "I should think you were capable of it."

Six-feet-one in his stockings, broad-shouldered, with a magnificent chest, Mannering looked just the man to open a new country or found a colony. He was a blonde giant, with a great tawny moustache, and a head covered with curls. Mrs Elwood admired him immensely; he was just the type she thought the perfection of manhood. She had been very disappointed because he never looked at her after they had been introduced, and she began to talk simply to attract his attention. In this she certainly succeeded.

"But it takes a great deal to annoy you, doesn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, a great deal," he admitted; "but

when it comes I'm bad to deal with. Didn't Lord Francis say you are staying with Miss Vane?"

"I am her companion," said Mrs Elwood, abruptly. "Don't look alarmed," she went on, laughing; "I won't teach her to smoke cigarettes. I know quite well, you think her so lovely and so innocent, it would frighten you to see a cigarette in her beautiful mouth."

"You are a thought-reader," said Manner-ing.

Mrs Elwood laughed.

"I have learned to read faces a little," she said; "and besides, I know something of life. All men feel like that at first about a young woman who is lovely. They are pleased with the picture as it is, and don't want it destroyed. But in a little while they get tired of it, and if some one else doesn't brush the bloom off they do it themselves. And when it's done, they wish

it had not been done, and go in search of another beauty, who knows no evil, in order to repeat the process."

"Oh, you are terrible!" said Mannering. "I really don't think men are all like that."

"Most are," said Mrs Elwood, "and the majority make the world. Some man will destroy all Juliet's innocent faith, and she in her turn, if she meets a good man afterwards, will destroy his. So the weary world goes on, and a quiet person like myself may not smoke a cigarette!"

Lord Mannering was taken with her straightforward manner, as she intended him to be.

"Well," he said, "it is a great thing for her to have one honest friend with her who sees through the shams of life."

And Victoria knew that she had made just the impression she wanted to make.

Mannering belonged to the order of men

who admire beauty in a woman, and will immolate themselves for it; but according to Mrs Elwood's knowledge of life, such men always need consoling sooner or later, and then they will turn to a woman they believe to be true, whether she be fair or plain.

Lord Francis and Dr Pynton Clifford came in together. The curtain was just going up. A profound silence fell on the house, for Juliet was "discovered." No one thought of anything else; even Mrs Elwood leaned forward, absorbed in watching the movements of the beautiful figure, and listening to the rich soft voice. "If I were a man I should love her," thought Mrs Elwood. "Good Heavens! fancy being a woman, and plain! A pretty woman is loved—a man loves—but to be a woman and plain! what a fate!"

Dr Pynton Clifford had brought some-

thing in, which he placed carefully in a corner of the box. At the close of the scene he rose quietly and fetched it, and just at the right moment leaned forward, and with the skill of long practice flung it at Juliet's feet. It was a glorious bouquet. She looked up and saw who had thrown it. Lord Francis, at his side, had drawn back a little, and was laughing. A moment after a great basket of flowers was handed up from the orchestra. This came from Dr Pynton Clifford also, and contained his card and a note, which he had written hastily at his favourite florist's.

Lord Mannering said something in an undertone when the bouquet was thrown; something that sounded angry. Mrs Elwood asked him to repeat it. But he only shook his head and leaned back in his chair, a very savage expression on his face. Mrs Elwood laughed to herself.

“He is angry,” she thought, “because the old doctor has been so quick and stepped in first. Oh, how simple men are! As if Juliet had enough sense in her to take any notice of Dr Pynton Clifford’s attentions. Not yet. She has to fall in love, and break her heart, before she will have any sense.”

Having been played in the country, as well as thoroughly rehearsed, the piece went as smoothly as though it had run a week; so the audience was kept in a good humour, and its enthusiasm not damped by any misfortunes. The fire burned brighter, instead of becoming exhausted as it sometimes does; and when all was over, Juliet received a perfect ovation, and Heywood was applauded more heartily than he had ever been in his life. The public loved him for the moment; for had he not given them a new idol! And there

is nothing the public values so much as a real idol, one worthy of all adoration. Heywood had given them this, and they applauded him.

Juliet, hurrying away to her dressing-room as soon as she could escape, found that Graham had placed the flowers on her dressing-table. She buried her face in them; they spoke to her of fresh air and garden scents. It was very kind, she thought, of her father's friend, to give her these.

"Let us go home quickly, Graham," she said; "my head aches, and I do so want to be out in the garden."

Graham was a perfect dresser, and everything was already put away except what Juliet now wore. So in a very short time they were ready, Juliet once more in her black dress. She drew her heavy crape veil over her face, and went out through the narrow passages, Graham following her

carrying the flowers. Some one came behind, and pushed past Mrs Graham.

“Miss Vane,” said an eager voice, wonderfully soft in spite of its eagerness, “I haven’t had a chance to congratulate you. What a success! What a first appearance! I have never seen anything like it!”

It was Maurice Denvil, still in his stage-dress, with the necessary touch of make-up on his face. Yet there was that in the liquid fire of his glance, as he looked into her dark eyes, that came to her like the scent of the flowers—strong, real, glorious. Youth, beauty, love! She could not have put the thoughts that rushed into her brain into words, but they affected her none the less. She paused and looked up at him, but did not speak, until suddenly she realised that in a low voice he was talking—he was asking her if he might call.

“Yes—” she said, “I will tell you—or

write—I am going to have a day, but nothing is settled yet. Yes, you must come and see my garden—it is beautiful now.”

Lord Francis was coming towards them from the stage door; he looked to see who she was talking to.

“Yes, Denvil,” he said, “the child lives in the country. I’ll drive you down on Sunday afternoon. Come, Juliet, you must be tired.”

At the stage door a little group was collected, to see the new star to her carriage; and her crape veil was a woeful disappointment. Dr Pynton Clifford was there, and Lord Mannering. The doctor stood to watch her as she passed, and then went away to his own brougham, in which a very lovely lady was sitting waiting for him. Mrs Elwood, Juliet, and Graham got into their carriage; behind it stood Lord Francis’, and Mrs Elwood saw that Lord

Mannering got into it with him. "Was he only giving Mannering a lift, or was he bringing him down to Putney?" Victoria wondered. It soon became evident (for the horses were good, and 'civilised London soon left behind) that he was bringing him down to Putney. Then Victoria wondered more. "Does he mean Juliet to marry this young lord? I expect he does. Well, there will be little difficulty; he's head over ears in love with her already."

Juliet was tired, with the pleasant weariness that comes after successful work. She leaned back in her corner of the carriage and paid no attention to what was going on. Arrived at Putney, she went quickly into the house, leaving the others to follow her. She passed through the hall into the drawing-room; its windows opened wide upon a green lawn and glowing flower-beds. She took off her bonnet and in another

moment was in the garden, her face buried among the leaves of her favourite rose-tree.

"Gone back to nature!" said Lord Francis looking after her. "Let us follow her. Graham, tell them to send us some tea out into the garden."

Juliet had a hammock slung between two oak trees, and in this she sat, swinging, her feet just touching the grass, her figure leaning back in an attitude of the most graceful languor. Mannering's eyes devoured her, and worshipped. Lord Francis saw it, and was content. Victoria Elwood had gone up to her room professedly to take off her bonnet; in reality to smoke a cigarette. When it was finished she armed herself with a parasol, and joined the others.

She now saw Lord Francis in a character which he had hitherto not exhibited to her. He was talking, rather brilliantly;

doing all the work. Juliet was too mentally exhausted with the excitement she had passed through to make any effort, and Lord Mannering appeared to be stricken dumb. He simply sat and looked at Juliet.

“Nature,” Lord Francis was saying, “is the one friend who is always true to us, and, of course, we fail to appreciate it. Fidelity soon loses its charm. We know the sun will shine the same another day, and so we neglect it to-day, and are punished by getting old before our time. It is the men and women who love Nature that keep young. She has so much pleasure to give us—always, always unfailingly. But most of us don’t think about it till we are already old.”

“Lord Mannering talks of taking to bush life,” said Mrs Elwood; “Is that a symptom of a love of Nature?”

"No," said Lord Mannering; "it only indicates a disgust for human nature."

"Ah, that's bad, very bad, my dear boy," said Lord Francis, shaking his head. "Get over that fancy as soon as possible. It is only a passing malady of the mind. Human nature is all right; it's what it always was and always will be. It is very mixed; but I do assure you we should be terribly bored if it wasn't."

"You always seem to fear boredom more than any other calamity," said Juliet, from out her hammock. She was looking at the blue sky through the tracery of the grey-green leaves overhead, and could not even imagine what boredom was.

"So I do," said Lord Francis; "and so will you, when you are a little older. You are young! Enjoy the priceless gift of youth while you have it."

"It isn't altogether a matter of youth,

I think," said Mannering. "I have known what boredom was ever since I can remember. My own people always bored me to death, even when I was a boy; and I fail to see what there is in Nature to give so much pleasure."

"Your fault is that you haven't learned the art of living yet," said Lord Francis. "You haven't discovered sensation. Some people can only be roused by the touching of certain chords. Tell me, surely there are things in the world that interest and please you?"

"Yes," said Mannering, and looked at Juliet.

"Then take these things, revel in them, and so you will develop in yourself the fine power of pleasure. Don't go in for denial—it is the maddest folly man ever invented. I'm afraid you've a touch of monasticism about you, Mannering."

"No, not exactly that; but I am dogged. If I can't have what I want, I don't want anything else; and I admit that makes life difficult. However, I'll do my best to try your prescription."

And he did. Before a week was out, everybody had got used to Mannering's driving up every afternoon and spending an hour in the garden with Juliet and Mrs Elwood.

At the end of the week, "Evangeline" was put on at night, and Juliet's life of work began in earnest. All her thoughts were given to that, and she paid no more attention to Mannering than "if he had been an effigy," as Mrs Graham expressed it; and, indeed, he looked very like one sometimes, patiently sitting by and watching Juliet with his dog-like, worshipping eyes.

The first night of "Evangeline" was on

a Saturday; and on the afternoon of the Sunday following it, there was quite a little crowd in Juliet's garden. She held her first reception, and found herself a queen in her own right, as a beautiful actress always must be.

Lord Mannering came early and worshipped, almost in silence, for about half-an-hour before any one else arrived. Juliet talked to her flowers and forgot he was there, while Mrs Elwood tried to attract his attention in vain. She found she could do this in Juliet's absence, but not in her presence. From which she argued that the young man was really in love, and regarded him with profound pity.

"And she thinks no more of him than if he were a stuffed poodle," reflected the cynic. "It is always the same!"

CHAPTER XI.

“There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth.”

ABOUT half-past five on that Sunday afternoon Lord Francis drove up, with Maurice Denvil at his side.

They joined the group in the garden. Dr Pynton Clifford was the most conspicuous figure in it at the moment. He was the centre of attraction, as he was telling a very good story. Dressed to perfection in his favourite silver-grey, carrying in his hand a splendid silver-mounted stick, which had been presented to him by a grateful patient, he looked wonderfully young, even close to Juliet's perfect youth. But he did not *feel* young to others. What he felt himself none

can tell. Lord Francis reflected on this as he took a chair by his side, and became one of the group of listeners.

“What a difference!” he thought to himself. “Berkeley is almost oppressively young, but there’s not one breath of the real thing about him. Now, Denvil is youth and passion embodied—he has given me a *feeling* of youth all through our drive—I miss the feeling now, as one misses an accustomed wine—yes, he’s a dangerous fellow is Denvil—if I were a woman I should be madly in love with him. My one hope for Juliet is, that she’s too young herself to appreciate his charm. An older woman would want to drink the youth from his lips.”

He glanced up at Denvil, as these thoughts passed through his mind. The boy—for he looked nothing more—here, in the sunshine, with his smooth shaven

face, was standing, waiting to address Juliet, his eyes fixed on her the while. He was beautiful—like a woman—no, like a fawn. Denvil had a certain feminine delicacy of appearance, which gave him something of the beauty of a woman at times, and this was an added charm to those who knew that it was the veil of unusual physical strength.

Lord Francis forgot, in thinking about Juliet, that though she had the ignorance of youth, yet she had inherited ability which almost compensated for it. She had an innate capacity for the art of life; she did not need to discover sensation, it was awake within her; as yet she had only found it in Nature; had given it vent in her passion for flowers, her love of air and movement, and the delights of out-of-door life. But

Denvil was teaching her that there is beauty in manhood. She was only dimly aware of it as yet. Nevertheless, she made no mistake. She knew perfectly well that only one person in the group which gathered round her interested her in the least, and that that person interested her very much. She liked to look at Denvil's face when he was not watching her; liked to gaze at those violet eyes, which sometimes made her think of the sea and sometimes of wild woodland violets wet with dew. Sometimes a slight foam came to his lips when he spoke eagerly, for he was very excitable. How beautiful he looked then, all alive and alight!

Society habits and society instincts veiled all the passions that broke into life on this pleasant Sunday afternoon in that sunny garden. Mannering hid under a mask of quiet boredom the rage that consumed him

as he watched the old doctor pay his elaborate attentions to Juliet. He longed to ask her permission to pick him up and drop him over the hedge into the road. But, he asked himself, even if such conduct were permissible, why open her innocent eyes to the depravity of the creature? Her ignorance was a perfect safeguard at present. "But," swore Mannering silently, "if he ever *does* insult her—" the mental sentence was finished by a glance at his clenched fist.

Rather a terrible young man this, to have sitting among a group of quiet people! However, there he was, and there he seemed inclined to remain. He said but little, yet he clung to his seat next Juliet with as much assurance as if he were the finest conversationalist in the world, and was amusing all the company. Maurice Denvil tried his best to move

him by standing in front of him while he talked to Juliet, but it was useless. The man on the other side, however, being an ordinary person, whose name it is unnecessary to chronicle in these pages, eventually became too jealous of Denvil's appearance, and the manner in which he took up Juliet's attention, to be able to bear it any longer; so he got up and went away, and Denvil dropped into his chair. Dr Clifford held to his position in front of her, and in the centre of the group. Here were the elements of a tragedy, and the simmering had already begun, but nobody knew it. It is possible Mrs Elwood had some glimmerings of it, for outsiders always see most of the game, but certainly no one else. Lord Francis was only tormented by one fear, lest Juliet should fall in love with Maurice Denvil. And he comforted

himself with the idea that she was too young and foolish. In such wise do people, who have attained years of discretion, make lamentable mistakes. They forget that youth, though it may not have knowledge, possesses intuition. It stands in the same relation to age, in matters of intelligence, that a woman does to a man; it reasons not, but sometimes acts well from sheer conviction.

Juliet was in love, though she did not know it. And she had fallen in love, without hesitation or demur, with the handsomest and most attractive man in London. If Lord Francis had known all that was going on under his eyes he would have said, with regret,—“Deuced good taste; I should do the same in her place! What a pity he isn’t a duke.”

Juliet was so ignorant of love, that she knew as little about what was happening as anybody else. The only person who understood was Maurice Denvil. He had seen her eyes falter and droop before his ; he saw the long lashes tremble and fall when he approached her.

“I must win her,” he said to himself, “whatever it costs me.” And he knew it would cost him a great deal. But what a long way he was from measuring that cost !

CHAPTER XII.

“With you to live, to die, were bliss for me.”

JULIET VANE, in one week, became the rage. She experienced that condition of being adored, which is only given to a public idol.

Her dressing-room was always full of bouquets now. They came round by the stage door, and were given to Graham, with surreptitious fees. Boxes of flowers arrived which were carried to Putney, a performance much like carrying coals to Newcastle. Smaller boxes also made their appearance, containing more valuable and durable treasures. These were all submitted to Lord Francis, who inspected the cards always to be found within, and, after some

laughter and amusement which he enjoyed by himself, had them packed up again and sent back. He always knew where to send them, even if there were no addresses on the cards, as frequently happened.

Victoria Elwood took to visiting Juliet's dressing-room late in the evening, to see what had been sent. She would stand and look silently at the jewels if any were there, blaspheming in her heart the while. One night she actually burst into tears, when she had been looking for some time at a lovely diamond crescent sent by a very noble person. Juliet was frightened; it was like seeing a man cry.

"Oh, Mrs Elwood!" she exclaimed, "what is it grieves you like that? Do tell me."

Victoria dried her eyes and looked at her strangely.

"I will, some day," she said, "not

now." For she heard Lord Francis at the door.

The fact that these various offerings were all sent back was soon heard of at the clubs, and afterwards in drawing-rooms. And Juliet began to receive invitations from ladies who wanted her as an attraction at their receptions. Lord Francis, who arranged all these things, told her to refuse all the invitations she received at first, and dictated the letters.

Lord Mannering, who haunted Juliet and her father with a dogged tenacity, naturally heard of all this. When he called at Putney he was often left alone with Mrs Elwood, who, as she could never get him to talk of anything but Juliet, told him stories that inflamed his passionate, jealous heart. At last he got into the same frame of mind as Heywood had been in when he went down to Portsmouth,

though from a very different motive. He loved her desperately, and he felt convinced that any chance he might have would be gone if he waited. He must ask for her before some other man had won her heart.

And so, before Juliet had been three weeks on the stage, she might have become Lady Mannering.

He found her alone in the garden one afternoon, and, seizing his opportunity, proposed to her. Very quietly and straightforwardly did he say what he had to say. It was not necessary to say much—"with you to live, to die, were bliss for me" was the chief thing to be expressed, and he put it into as few words as possible. As to his wealth and his position, everybody knew all about these; he was the "catch" of the day; his personal appearance needed no excuse and no recommendation—a fine stalwart Englishman, a specimen of young

England at its best need say little about himself. And so the ordeal was soon over; he sat there in the golden summer afternoon waiting for Juliet's answer. After a little pause it came; a gentle refusal, the blow dealt with the delicate touch of a lady. It was not hesitation as to what the answer should be that caused the brief pause before she spoke—only the effort of choosing the kindest words.

Mannering got up and left her, with only a word—"Good-bye."

Juliet sat still, rocking in her hammock, with a pain at her heart that took the brightness out of the sunshine.

"My second lover!" she said to herself. "Oh, but I would rather have to fight a wretch like Heywood, than be obliged to hurt a kind soul like Lord Mannering!"

Lord Mannering, passing through the

house, met Mrs Elwood at the drawing-room door.

“Going?” she said. “Hullo! why what’s the matter?” For he had not been prepared to meet anyone, and the pain he suffered was visible in his face.

“Nothing—” he answered, forcing a smile. “Good-afternoon, Mrs Elwood.”

“Oh, nonsense, don’t go away like that!” said Mrs Elwood; “you know I’m your friend—perhaps I can help you.”

She spoke with a gentlemanly manner, which she had found successful with Mannering. He was afraid of agreeable women, for he had been angled for ever since he was of marriageable age. But this hail-fellow-well-met style of Mrs Elwood’s disarmed him. It gave him the feeling that she was straightforward and honest, and, further, that she did not want to make love to him. He hesitated a little, now, as she

spoke ; she seized her advantage, drew him back into the drawing-room, and shut the door.

"She has refused you, hasn't she?" she said.

"You are a witch," was Mannering's answer.

It never occurred to him (for before all else, he was a gentleman) that she could by any possibility have been watching them for the last half-hour. Anybody with average intelligence could read the meaning of the interview without hearing what was said.

"Don't be cast down," said Victoria. "You men are all so absurdly soft about a pretty woman. She'll accept you next time. She is as deep as—well, as a woman. You don't suppose she is going to jump down your throat at the first chance, though you *are* the best match going? Not at all. She wants you to beg and pray her to

marry you, and then afterwards, if you ever turn upon her because she has been an actress—and because—oh, of a hundred things, she'll remind you of that. Believe me, there's not a woman in the world worth suffering for as you are suffering now."

"You may be right," said Lord Mannering; "but I don't agree with you."

With which he took his departure; refusing to say anything further. But Victoria had learned what she wanted to know. She went out to Juliet in the garden.

"Your triumphs come early, Miss Vane," she said, quietly.

Juliet looked at her, startled.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"It is a triumph, is it not, even for a successful and beautiful actress, to be able to refuse Lord Mannering?"

"He has told you?" said Juliet, who rather resented his having done so. It seemed to vulgarise her sad feeling, and make it a thing of naught, that he should be so ready to talk to an outsider about what had passed.

"I met him, as he went out," said Victoria. "He looked like death, and I could not help asking him what was the matter. He told me enough for me to guess what had happened. What a pity you could not make him happy, instead of making him suffer."

"I could not help it," answered Juliet, in a low voice. "I had no idea he cared for me in that way."

Mrs Elwood looked at her with a sneer.

"Is it impossible for pretty women to avoid telling lies of this sort?" she asked herself. For she entirely believed Juliet had done her best to encourage Manner-

ing. Her great fault in judging the characters of others, was that she could not help imagining that they liked what she liked, and wanted what she wanted. She had not enough imagination to suppose otherwise. She was convinced that Juliet intended to marry Lord Mannering, and was simply acting a part.

“But you don’t care for anyone else, do you?” asked Mrs Elwood, and asked the question in good faith, which showed that Juliet was a very good actress. She was positively alarmed by the emotion which she found Maurice Denvil could rouse in her, and was therefore very much on her guard, so that she had effectually concealed it from everyone but Denvil himself. Whereas her civility to Lord Mannering had been construed into something quite different.

Juliet was very proud, and very re-

ticent; no one could force a confidence from her that she did not wish to give. She would have liked to answer Mrs Elwood very sharply for attempting to find out what was in her heart; but she did not care to show even as much feeling as that. She took no notice of the question, and simply said,—

“Lord Mannering is very nice and kind, but he does not amuse me.”

“But you don’t expect a husband to be amusing, do you?” exclaimed Victoria.

“I really do not know. I have not thought about it,” was Juliet’s answer, in rather a cold tone.

Mrs Elwood rose from her chair, and came and knelt beside Juliet, who was slowly swinging in her hammock.

“Why won’t you talk to me?” she said. “Why won’t you make a friend of me?” And she looked up at

Juliet with hunger in her great black eyes.

“I do make a friend of you,” said Juliet, more warmly, “but, indeed, I have nothing to tell you about Lord Mannering or anyone. Let us talk of something else. You have never told me why you cried that night when you were looking at those diamonds in my dressing-room.”

Juliet had not a particle of curiosity in her nature, and only said this in order to get Mrs Elwood's thoughts from herself.

Mrs Elwood sprang to her feet, and began to walk up and down on the grass like a tigress lashing herself into a rage. Her long eyelashes quivered with rising passion as she glanced now and again at Juliet.

“I will tell you,” she began, in a very

quiet voice, "I cried from hatred. Hatred of the world, which is so unjust. Only because you are beautiful, all these things are sent to you!"

Juliet looked at her in amazement. She had supposed some tender chord of memory had been touched, and expected to hear some story of the past.

"But I don't care for them," she said, not knowing what else to say.

"That's just what makes it so intolerable," went on Mrs Elwood, her voice full of intense bitterness. "So with the men,—they throw themselves at your feet, and you don't care for them—or say you don't. Why should everything be given to you, like this? You did not make yourself beautiful! I must tell you something about myself. I hope it won't shock or startle you. My mother was never married; I am an illegitimate child. I

don't blame her much now. She was a ballet-dancer, and she loved a man of high rank. Noblemen marry actresses when the actresses are clever enough to make them; but they don't marry ballet-dancers. Are you going to turn from me now, Miss Vane? Are you frightened? Some people are afraid of an illegitimate child, and think we are not made of the same flesh and blood as other people."

"But that is very unjust," said Juliet, warmly. "How can *you* help it? and what difference can it make in you?"

"Unjust! My God! There is nothing but injustice in this world! and it begins before we are born. Let me tell you a little more. My father is a man of title, of wealth, of position. He is ashamed to own me, ashamed to acknowledge me; and what I get from him I get by terrifying him with threats of exposure. For my

mother died suddenly, and fortunately for me he was away. I have some nice secrets of his in my possession; I could ruin him at any moment. And only because of this does he care whether I starve or not. He tried to get rid of me by marrying me to a brute."

"Are you speaking of *your father*?" asked Juliet, in a voice of horror.

"Yes, I am speaking of my father."

"He must be a cruel, wicked man."

"He is a devil," said Mrs Elwood, and then was silent a few moments, leaving Juliet to digest this piece of information.

"Does he know you are here?" asked Juliet presently.

"Yes, he knows I am here," answered Mrs Elwood; her eyes were on the ground. Suddenly she looked up, with a flash. "Oh, don't be afraid," she said. "He will never trouble anyone I am with. I had to

vow never to breathe his name before he would give me the money to buy the dress I have on. A nice father! Is it any wonder I am bitter? And he has another daughter—a legitimate daughter—one whom he is proud to own—for whom he takes every care. She has had everything life can give, and that I have not had; care, education, love, money. Is it right such a difference should be made because of a church service. Ah, but injustice begins before we are born. My sister—yes, my sister, though I suppose my father would faint if he heard me call her so—is very beautiful. The men all fall down and worship her at first sight; they never look at me. Miss Vane, I have told you a secret. I know you will keep it faithfully. But would you like me to leave the house—to leave you, now that you know it?”

Juliet leaned forward and stretched forth

both her hands to Mrs Elwood. Her warm heart ached for the embittered one.

“Dear Mrs Elwood, no ! Don’t imagine me so weak as that ! I am honoured by your trust in me. Perhaps you will find a little peace and happiness here to compensate for all this misery.”

Victoria came to her, took her hands, and looked down into the lovely upturned face.

“You are very beautiful !” she said. “You are a fortunate woman.”

There was something in the gaze of these great, fierce, black eyes that fascinated Juliet. She looked back into them in wonder at a life and a nature so unlike her own.

“I am very like a man,” said Victoria Elwood. “I think if a beautiful woman like you were to love me, I could be contented. Of course, it is easy to see why everything is yours. You are a delight to the eye. I love to look at that rich hair as much as

any of the men who come here to admire it. I could be contented to be a man, and an ugly one, if I had money and fortune to give to a creature like you, and have you to look at always. I should never let anyone else look at you!"

"How strange you are!" said Juliet.

"I am what my life and my luck have made me," said Mrs Elwood, sullenly.

She turned away, and began to walk restlessly about the lawn. Presently she came back again.

"Tell me," she said, coaxingly; "don't you care for Mannering, really?"

"I have told you so," said Juliet, drawing back within herself a little.

She had yet to learn that Mrs Elwood, whether from her own nature, or from the school of her life, I know not, never believed anything. She always imagined that the truth had to be either wheedled or startled

out of the person she was talking to. Juliet had never told an untruth in her life, and she could not understand this.

“But you’ll marry him, eventually, sha’n’t you?”

“I have told you I shall not,” said Juliet, “and begged you to talk of something else. The subject doesn’t please me.”

If she had known more of Mrs Elwood’s character, she would have known that to say this was simply to give an invitation. Victoria’s greatest pleasure was the dissection of other people’s minds and hearts, the probing of their feelings, the discovering of their secrets. She called this the study of human nature; other people sometimes called it morbid curiosity.

Fortunately for Juliet another visitor was seen emerging from the drawing-room window. It was Dr Pynton Clifford, carrying some offering or other in his hand. Mrs Elwood

sat down in her chair, and resigned herself to play chaperon.

“Surely,” Juliet thought to herself, “I am safe in talking to this old gentleman! He might be my father; nobody could suspect me of caring for him, even if he wasn’t married.”

For Juliet, with the terrible certitude of absolute youth, had looked right past Dr Clifford’s outer veil of it, and saw him simply as “quite old.” It was certainly true he was married; he had been married so long that the fact had almost lost its significance. But his wife gave large parties, and had sent Juliet invitations. So Juliet felt safe and happy.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BITTER SEED.

VICTORIA ELWOOD'S confidence in Juliet was shown by the fact that she did not think it worth while to ask her to say nothing of her story to Lord Francis. The talk had been confidential, and she knew quite well that Juliet would regard it as a matter of honour to be silent about it.

Lord Francis came to Juliet's dressing-room, as he generally did, late in the evening, and found Mrs Elwood sitting there alone. Graham had attended Juliet to the wings, to carry her train, and was waiting for her there. Mrs Elwood seized her opportunity. Lord Francis finished his tour of inspection quickly; there were two bouquets, but no

diamonds. She saw he was going—without speaking to her, save a curt “Good-evening, Mrs Elwood”—so she addressed him in her coldest and most disagreeable manner.

“I believe,” she said, “you consider it one of my duties to tell you if anything particular happens at home?”

“Certainly,” he answered, turning abruptly and looking at her; “what has happened?”

“Perhaps you won’t think it anything particular,” she said with a sneer; “but I thought I’d better tell you. Lord Mannering proposed to Juliet to-day, and she refused him. I hope you will not let her guess it is one of my duties to play the spy on her, because she might not like it.”

Lord Francis stood as one transfixed, gazing at Mrs Elwood.

“Mannering has proposed—asked her to marry him?—”

“Certainly,” said Victoria, “all noblemen are not scoundrels.”

“And she has refused him,” went on Lord Francis, ignoring Victoria’s remark.

Very possibly he really did not notice it; he was well accustomed to such speeches from her.

He was startled at first; but immediately recovered himself.

“I’m glad you told me,” he said, thoughtfully. “For once in your life you did right. In fact you are behaving unusually well just now. I hope to Heaven it is not the lull before an outbreak.”

“There will be no outbreak if you do not give me cause!” replied Victoria instantly with a dangerous flash in her eyes.

Lord Francis paid no heed to her, but said “Good-night” absently, and went away.

Victoria rose, and walked up and down the room like a tigress in its cage.

"Yes," she said to herself, "he means her to marry Mannering. She is to have wealth, position, luxury, happiness simply thrown at her. And I! A dependant in her house, a servant. And not a creature in the world that cares whether I live or die!"

She stopped in front of Juliet's mirror, and looked at herself.

"I'm not a bit less good-looking than other women who find it easy enough to fascinate men. *Why* is it they won't even look at me? I can make Mannering treat me as a friend; but that's all. *Why, why?*"

If she had asked herself why she herself admired Juliet, even against her will, the answer would have been not because of her individual charms, but because the magic of sweetness blended the whole. She could have told you that while a pretty woman has opportunities, it is the sweet woman who

commands life. She knew all this from observation. But we cannot study ourselves, and she did not know that even when she was in her gentlest mood the spirit of bitterness and jealousy that was in her pervaded her whole being.

Lord Francis had left the door open when he went out, and someone who was passing paused and looked at Victoria as she stood there. She turned to see who it was. It was Heywood. He knew he was quite safe; Juliet would be on the stage for another ten minutes.

It would take a very wise person to account for the fact that people who are at war with the world, whose hands are against every man's, always recognise each other. It may be that they are kindred spirits, and feel drawn together. But their friendships are peculiar; formed for the moment only, and very readily converted

into bitterest enmity. Heywood had felt an inclination to talk to Mrs Elwood ever since he had first seen her. He thought he could persuade her to tell him things he was longing to know. He admired and hated Lord Francis and Juliet for, as he would have expressed it, getting the better of him; he was full of curiosity as to Juliet's present life, her friends, her favourites, her prospects. He cherished the hope that some day he might be able to blight these last, as payment of the grudge he considered that he owed her. But his chief difficulty lay in the fact that he could not get any of her companions to talk to him, and tell him what was going on. Lord Francis treated him with silent contempt ever since the Portsmouth episode; and he knew better than to approach Graham. But his keen eye told him Victoria Elwood was made of different material.

"Good-evening, Mrs Elwood," he said in his most agreeable manner, just coming within the door of the dressing-room.

"Have you quite settled down with Miss Vane now?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs Elwood.

"She's too proud even to speak to her manager, now," said Heywood, assuming the winning air with which he obtained the liking of strangers or persons whom he wished to make use of. "It is always the way with these stars. They are perfectly unapproachable after they've once mounted the ladder, and quite forget the old friends who helped to get them there. But I can't help feeling just as kindly an interest in her as ever. She's too lovely to forget all in a moment. Tell me, who is first favourite with her now?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs Elwood,

bitterly. "Of course all the men are at her feet."

"Naturally enough — she's the fashion just now, that's all. But there's a favourite, of course."

"If so, I don't know who it is," said Mrs Elwood, who felt more at home with Heywood than with anyone else she had met in London. "I begin to think she must be fond of that handsome fellow Denvil, though I must say she never shows it. But how else can you account for her refusing Lord Mannering? Either that, or she's mad, or, as I really think more likely, she's playing her airs off on Mannering, and means to marry him in the end, after he's asked her once or twice more."

"Lord Mannering wants to marry her!" exclaimed Heywood, staring at Victoria, with

his cold grey eyes full of astonishment. "It isn't possible?"

"Anyhow it's true," said Victoria, "possible or not."

At that moment Juliet was heard talking to Lord Francis. She had come off the stage; he had waited to speak to her, and they were coming to her dressing-room together. Heywood made all haste to disappear.

When they entered, a glance from Lord Francis told Victoria she was not wanted. There was always a seat kept for her in the front of the house, and she went round to it now, obeying Lord Francis very readily. In small matters she never dared to annoy him.

"You have time to talk to me for a few minutes, haven't you, Juliet?" he said.

Graham took the hint now, and went away, closing the door behind her. Lord

Francis and Juliet were left alone in the brilliantly-lit little room, strewn with the articles of dress which she had next to put on, and sweet with the scent of flowers. She sat down in the chair before her large mirror.

"Yes," she said, "I have a few minutes. What is it?"

There was no time to lose, so Lord Francis plunged into his subject.

"I have gathered to-night, Juliet," he began very seriously, "that Lord Mannering has proposed to you, and you have refused him?"

"Who told you?" asked Juliet quickly.

"No one told me—I gathered it. You must understand I know Mannering very well, and can guess a great deal from manner, without needing to be told in so many words. Juliet, I want you to reconsider this, and not decide hastily. If you married

Mannerling all my anxieties for you would be over. If your mother had lived she could not have done better for you. He is not only the best *parti* of the day, but he is the best fellow in the world. You will not only have wealth and position, but happiness. That is a great deal. I don't ask you to accept him; I don't want to influence you; but I want you not to give him his *congé* immediately. Let him go on visiting the house for a while, if he promises not to speak to you again for a certain length of time. Will you do this to please me?"

Juliet shook her head.

"I would much rather not, papa. Lord Mannerling bores me."

"Bores you!" cried Lord Francis. "Good Heavens! one would think you were a woman of sixty with an assured future. You can't afford to talk like that, Juliet. You must marry; you don't know, you

can't guess what the stage is to an actress who stays on it till she is old. It is awful! There is no hurry, of course; you have plenty of youth to play with. But you cannot have a better offer than Lord Mannering's if you wait till doomsday for it. Bore you! My dear, to talk of boredom is a luxury permitted to age, not to youth. Juliet," he said suddenly, in a different tone, "there is no one else, is there?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Juliet.

What else could she say? Denvil had never spoken a word of love to her; and she had not allowed herself to listen to the talk of her own heart.

"You're not falling in love with Denvil?" he said, in the same quick voice. "Tell me the truth, Juliet. Any woman would be excusable for it, he is so confoundedly handsome. But you can't refuse Mannering

for the sake of an actor—remember that—it's impossible!”

Juliet had flushed crimson at the mention of Denvil's name. She made no answer.

“Tell me the truth, Juliet,” reiterated her father.

“I have nothing to tell you,” she said.

“Well, to please me, be civil to Manner-ing, and let him go on visiting at the house. You may get to like him better.”

At this moment Graham opened the door.

“It's time for you to change your dress, Miss,” she said.

“Come in, Graham,” said Lord Francis, “I'm just going. Come, Juliet, be reasonable. I don't ask much of you.”

“Very well,” said Juliet.

And with this answer Lord Francis was satisfied. He said “Good - night,” left her dressing-room, and went out of the theatre by the stage door. He met

Heywood and Maurice Denvil, who had apparently been out together.

When Heywood hurried away from the door of Juliet's dressing-room he met Denvil on the stairs. Heywood had observed Denvil's intense admiration for Juliet, and he seized the opportunity of planting a shaft, without dreaming of the tragic consequences which would follow from it.

"Have you heard?" he said, stopping Denvil, and speaking in a low voice. "Do you know our star is likely to become Lady Mannering? The silly fellow actually wants to marry her!"

"Is she going to marry him?" asked Maurice Denvil, with lips that were suddenly parched dry. The cruel flame of jealousy sprang to life in his heart for the first time in his life.

"So it's understood," said Heywood, coolly embellishing his story; "but I ex-

pect the affair will quickly be off, when I've seen Mannering. I've only got to say a word or two about that little affair at Portsmouth. I think I ought to, for Mannering's a good fellow."

"You scoundrel!" cried Denvil, "how dare you talk like that? You know you played a trick on her!" and he seized Heywood by the collar and shook him. He was very strong, spite of his almost effeminate beauty, and Heywood's face turned pale.

"You'll be heard in the front!" he exclaimed. "Be quiet, man, and take your hands off me. It's nothing to you, is it? You're not the lady's future husband? We'll see what Mannering says. But, I tell you, she was madly in love with me, and followed me down to Portsmouth, and then, because I would not marry her, got up this story against me; and, of course

her father backed her up. Come and have a brandy and soda. You won't be fit to go on, if you get so excited."

Heywood escaped, and made his way downstairs quickly. He felt a distinct need of the brandy and soda himself, after that shaking. He did not want to quarrel with Denvil, who was very essential to the success of "Evangeline." So he took the shaking quietly.

Denvil followed him, utterly stupefied with all he had heard.

"It's an infernal lie what you say!" he began again, the minute they were in the street. "I knew all about it at the time. It was my doing that Miss Vane's maid came down to her."

"Oh, that was your doing, was it?" said Heywood. "Well, it was an uncommon piece of luck for me; it enabled me to get rid of the young lady. And to me

she was simply a white elephant, very much in the way. But still I think Mannering ought to have a hint."

Denvil was thinking hard. He did not believe Heywood; but the tooth of jealousy had fastened on him with this news about Mannering, and he listened to what, at another time, he would have laughed to scorn. His mind was all in disorder, and he could not judge calmly. Was she going to marry Mannering? He *knew* he had her love—it was no matter of hope or fear—he *knew* it—with the keen sight of passion he had read it in her eyes. He was certain there was no deceit in their glances; they spoke true. But if she were capable of marrying Lord Mannering—if she were, like all the rest, ready to sell herself for money and position, anything else said about her might be true.

This is how men argue—men who are

supposed to have the gift of reason. If they are forced to believe a woman guilty of one sin, they are instantly ready to believe her guilty of the whole decalogue.

So fiercely, so absolutely, was Maurice Denvil in love with Juliet, so convinced was he that he had won her heart, that to him the idea of her marrying Lord Mannering appeared nothing less than a sin. Heywood might be telling the truth—he might himself be utterly deceived in her. Oh, the agony of jealousy he suffered!

It was the first time this awful pain had visited him. He had never loved as he loved Juliet; yet he had always been very successful with women. Naturally, his remarkable beauty had brought him many opportunities. Many a woman had been ready to sacrifice her life for him, others to endow him into fortune and ease. He had never yet been the one to suffer. He

was not generally fond of women's society, and lived so quietly as to excite some curiosity among his acquaintances.

But now everything was changed. He was swept away on the wild waves of a great passion. He knew that if he found Juliet Vane to be the most despicable creature living, he should love her just the same. It made no difference in his passion, this gnawing agony of doubt. His experience of women was not one to make him resolutely reject that doubt. No one had ever told him the actual story of the Portsmouth episode, and he had not cared to ask. As to Juliet's having been in love with Heywood, that seemed to be rather a difficult thing to believe; but Heywood, in spite of his ugliness, had been known to exercise a strange influence when he chose to.

Denvil was utterly confused and puzzled.

He tried to talk quietly to Heywood, and get him to tell more; but Heywood would not.

“Don’t give me away,” he said at last. “Don’t let Lord Francis even suppose I’ve said anything about this, because I promised him I would not.”

“All right,” said Denvil; “I’m not likely to make mischief, but I wish to Heaven I could get at the truth.”

“We shall be late,” exclaimed Heywood — words that stop any conversation among actors, however vital, and the two hurried back to their dressing-rooms meeting Lord Francis on the way. Denvil would have given worlds to have stopped and asked him whether, indeed, his daughter was such a criminal as to have promised herself to Lord Manering. However, that was impossible.

They passed each other quickly, and with the merest nods of recognition. Could Denvil but have guessed Lord Francis's errand !

CHAPTER XIV.

“When anger spreads through the breast, guard thy tongue from barking idly.”

THE Player's Club was a favourite resort of Lord Mannering's, and here Lord Francis went to look for him. For entirely different reasons these two noblemen affected the artistic society they found here; and were more often to be seen in its rooms than in the aristocratic clubs they belonged to. Lord Francis knew there was no large party that night which Mannering was likely to attend, for the young man was not social in his tastes, and was not a frequenter of drawing-rooms. He made his appearance in society only on occasions of political

significance. There was nothing going on at the House to take him there ; so it was a choice of looking for him in one of the Pall Mall Clubs, or in this more Bohemian resort near the Strand.

Lord Francis decided to try the Players' Club first ; and his sagacity was rewarded by finding Mannering in the card-room, playing cards with an expression on his face which showed that he was doing so for the simple purpose of distracting himself from unpleasant thoughts. It was too early for any of the actors yet ; but he had gathered together a small company—an old playwright, a man of brilliant intellect, who was nearly in the grave before the world found him out, and who was cynical, but not soured ; an actor out of work, terribly soured and jealous, who could not afford to gamble, but was

flattered by the chance of playing cards with a lord; and a stripling who was trying to learn his way about town, and did everything he was asked to do. These four were playing whist with the awful solemnity and silence which characterises that game when played in England. No game is better suited to a man in a desperate humour, for it is one which permits you to maintain a savage silence. A lively party this, which Lord Francis came upon! Mannering looked up, and said, "Good-evening," and relapsed into silence.

"When your game is finished," said Lord Francis, "I want to speak to you," with which he seated himself in an arm-chair and looked on as silently as the players played. At length the solemn dissipation came to an end, and Mannering rose from the table.

"I am at your service," he said to Lord Francis.

"Come into a quieter place," said Lord Francis. For now the rooms were filling; actors and dramatic critics, and the men who affect their society, were coming in numbers.

The card-tables were besieged by a noisy set of men, who seemed bent on enjoying themselves. Mannering looked round gloomily.

"These fellows are making too much noise to be able to hear anything we say," he observed.

"That's true," said Lord Francis.

He turned his chair round so that he sat with his back to the noisy crowd. Mannering drew another chair close to him, and lit a cigar.

"What is it?" he asked, without a shade of interest in his face.

"It's about Juliet," said Lord Francis.

"About Miss Vane?" queried Mannering, and a flash came into his eyes. On that gloomy face it was like lightning in a dark sky. It vanished instantly, but not before Lord Francis had seen it, for he was watching Mannering intently.

"I believe," said Lord Francis, speaking very low, but very clearly, "you did her the honour to-day to ask her to marry you."

"Yes," said Mannering, "that is true."

"And she refused you."

"Yes; that is also true."

"Well—tell me, if you don't mind—do you care about it?"

"About what?—about her refusing me? Naturally, or I should not have asked her."

"You really wish to marry her, and do still, in spite of her refusal?"

"No other woman but Juliet Vane will ever be Lady Mannering."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow, don't

talk like that. It's absurd. However, what I want to say is this,—If your heart is yet on the thing, I believe it to be only a matter of time with Juliet. She talked to me about it this evening, and, in fact, she sent you a message. Of course I was only to deliver it if I found you in the same mind."

Now how the gloomy face lit up! It was transfigured.

"What was it?" he asked, with a break in his voice.

"Why, this,—she wants you to go on visiting just the same—don't make any difference. I should advise you not to speak again just yet; give her time. She is a strange girl, like her mother. They belong to the order of women who love once only, and in earnest. They don't take sudden fancies; they don't value money or position. If Juliet marries you,

it will be for yourself, not because you are the best *parti* of the day."

"I know that," said Lord Mannering. "She was very decided to-day. I can't understand this change."

"Don't ask me to explain a woman's actions, my dear fellow. I can only tell you facts."

"I have telegraphed for my yacht to be ready for me to-morrow. But I won't go away if she really sent me that message."

"Of course she did. I'm not likely to invent it. Go down and ask her to-morrow whether she sent it. Knowing Juliet as I do, I think I may safely congratulate you. Good-night, if you are going to stay here."

Mannering said "Good-night," lit another cigar, and settled into his chair to think, while Lord Francis went out to his brougham, which was waiting for him. It was late, but he still had engagements to keep.

The whole face of the world had altered for Mannering in these last few moments, and he was shaken by the unexpected transition from gloom to delight. His was a slow, dogged nature, and when a sudden change of feeling fell upon him like this, he had to think it out in order to understand it. He was not particularly pleased at being worried into joining a card party by some men who knew him very well, and had just come in. However, he had no excuse to offer, so he joined them. Maurice Denvil was one. They were all very excited, but Denvil the most of all; there was a wild glitter in those wonderful blue eyes of his. They looked, not like dewy violets, not like gleaming seawater now, but like precious stones—the soft gleam that often made them so fascinating had hardened to this jewel-like glitter.

The party played poker, and got very ex-

cited over it. The excitement was helped, no doubt, by a continual supply of brandy and soda. But Denvil, who was the most excited of all, did not drink much. It was unnecessary; he was already maddened, intoxicated, by the sting of his own thoughts. Mannering was the only quiet man in the group. But at last even he was roused.

It came quite suddenly and unexpectedly, the crisis of the evening—or rather of the morning, for it was three o'clock. Denvil had been losing heavily all the time; his thoughts were not with the game. Mannering won. He was always cool, happen what might. Denvil had been ominously quiet for some time, when he flung his hand down on the table.

“No good!” he said, “the luck’s against me. The luck’s with Lord Mannering. It always is. But how does a man manage to be lucky in love and at cards both?”

It can't be, it can't be! The luck will turn, Mannering, the luck will turn!"

He leaned across the table as he spoke, and looked into Mannering's face. Mannering turned a shade paler.

"What do you mean?" he said, drawing back a little.

"Just what I say," went on Denvil, "the luck will turn. But I'll give you the tip if you like,—'See that she deceive not thee as she deceived her father.'"

"What 'she' is it?" demanded Mannering, and the two men looked at each other now in a way that showed the other men there was something more here than the mere words that were being said. They were rivals; their eyes acknowledged it; each longed to destroy the other, and fling him out of the path.

The others were silent, startled, for there

had been nothing to prepare them for these looks of hatred.

“What ‘she’ is it?” again demanded Mannering, white with anger.

Denvil, on the contrary, was flushed. Perhaps he had never looked more handsome than now; he was carried out of himself by his rage against Mannering.

“Do you want me to say?” he asked. “I’ve only quoted Shakespeare so far. But I’ll say, if you like. I’ll give the name of your future wife, and wish you luck of her!”

“Denvil!” exclaimed one of the other men, “keep quiet. You are mad!”

“Dare to speak her name here,” cried Mannering, “and I’ll horsewhip you!”

“Oh, you’ve the right to protect her now!—very well—here’s to the health of Juliet Vane, the future Countess of Mannering.”

He leaned across the table, took up a full glass of brandy, touched his lips with it, and then flung it straight into Mannering's face.

It was all over in a minute. The act seemed to sober everyone, even Denvil himself. Mannering was perfectly quiet. He wiped the brandy from his face, and rose from the table.

"You shall hear from me, sir," he said, and with a good-night to the others, left the room.

Denvil bowed in reply, and then fell back into his seat and began to shudder. All the other men dropped away quietly into the next room, but one, the one who had tried to prevent Denvil from speaking.

"Are you mad or drunk, Denvil?" he asked, looking curiously at him.

"Mad!" was the answer.

And he gave no further explanation; and

his friend left him. But presently he was again surrounded. Everyone thought him in the wrong, but he was immensely popular. He would not defend himself. The fierce excitement, which had carried him away so completely, was succeeded by an apathetic despair. All he understood was, that Mannering had, by his words and manner, acknowledged that Juliet was to be his wife. It was true then! Juliet was to be his wife! Oh, the false-hearted creature! Oh, the evil that women do! That was all his thought. Juliet was to be his wife.

CHAPTER XV.

“Now love masters my limbs and shakes me,
fatal creature, bitter sweet.”

By noon the next day everything was arranged. Mannering had carried matters with a high hand. Every effort was made by such of his friends as knew of the affair to prevent his fighting Denvil. But his mind was made up. No apology from Denvil would be accepted. And as Denvil would have died sooner than apologise the thing had to go on. All the preliminaries were speedily arranged. This was Thursday. On Sunday morning Denvil was to cross to Ostende. Mannering had his yacht waiting for him and could cross at any moment. Denvil,

of course, could not leave until Sunday morning because of the theatre. If all went well there was time for him to be back for the play on Monday night.

The men who had been present all pledged themselves to Mannering never to reveal that it was Juliet's name which had caused the quarrel. This they very readily did. She was universally adored, and they all thought Denvil had been mad.

No one knew how he spent all that day, after the details of the affair of honour were settled. He had received Mannering's messenger at his house at Kensington. He lived in a pretty villa here, which had all the appearance of a domestic home; but only a very few persons were on sufficient terms of intimacy with him to visit him in it. Heywood was one of these; and as Denvil felt very apprehensive lest

the manager should get any news of the affair, and come up to question him, he went out directly he was free to do so, and did not return all day.

Mannering ordered his horses out in the afternoon, and drove down to Putney. Here he found Heywood, Lord Francis, and the dramatic author who had been playing cards with him at the Players' Club over night. The old man, whose mind worked as freshly as when he was young, and could have enjoyed the rewards of his work if he might have earned them then, had conceived of a grand *rôle* for Juliet. He was to write a play on purpose for her, and they were all engaged in talking about the situations, and in making suggestions.

Juliet showed not the slightest emotion at Mannering's entrance. She received him as she would any friend who was quite in-

different to her—with perfect civility, but that was all.

It was close on the end of the season now, and “Evangeline” was to be taken on tour in the provinces. The new play was to be ready for rehearsal directly the tour was over, and the theatre was to open with it for the winter. The *rôle* for Juliet was a great one; the idea of the play brilliant; and in the interest and excitement about it Juliet received Heywood without any reminder of the past. But she was only coldly civil to him, and he treated her with a cringing respect. Mannerer noted this, and speculated as to what it might mean. He liked to see the proud way in which Juliet carried herself; Heywood’s presence brought a tinge of contemptuous scorn into her manner which became her well.

Nothing was talked of but the new

play. As soon as the outline of it was decided upon Heywood went away. Man-nering noticed that she did not shake hands with him when he said good-bye; merely bowing in a very distant way. The others all left soon afterwards, driving back to town to dinner, and Juliet was left alone to dream of her new *rôle* until it was time to drive to the theatre. She had a brougham of her own now, and a pair of fast horses, so that the journey did not take long. As usual, she and Mrs Elwood and Graham went together in the brougham. They were very quiet, for Juliet was absorbed and excited in thinking of the work before her. The new play would place her on a level with the great actresses of the past, whose names she revered, if she could compass her part. Naturally the thought excited her, for she was a born artist. In her imag-

ination she saw herself, her own face, her own figure, in the situations which had been talked over; and the glorious conviction came to her that she could do it—that she had real greatness before her. Graham was very interested too; she thought to herself that surely Marguerite, with all her dread of Juliet's being on the stage, would have been proud to see her now, idolised, worshipped, and with it all, as Graham expressed it in her own mind, so modest and such a perfect lady. Mrs Elwood was suffering from one of her fits of envy; it was like a physical anguish. She always suffered in this way when she had to sit by and see Juliet receive her visitors like a queen. And Mannering's speedy return troubled her. Was it possible, she wondered, that his infatuation was so great as to make him crawl back to Juliet's feet immediately, unasked? Or had Lord

Francis induced Juliet to call him back? Nothing troubled Victoria more than to feel that there was something she did not know, however absolutely the circumstance might be the private concern of another person. Envy and curiosity were the two strongest passions of her nature. She glanced at Graham, wondering whether she was in Juliet's confidence and could be cajoled to reveal it.

Another person looked at Graham in the same way that evening. This was Denvil. He got to the theatre in time to dress, in a state of depression absolutely new to him. He could not shake it off. This was Friday night. On Sunday morning he would leave London; perhaps never to return. Perhaps he would never see her again! The thought was insupportable. He dare not visit her, for the risk of meeting Mannering was too great. And Mannering had a right to be

there, while he had not! When he thought this the demon of hatred took hold of him again, and he longed for the moment when they would meet in earnest.

In the meantime the only pleasure he had was to stand at the wings and watch Juliet. Once or twice she looked at him as he stood there, and he saw the glow come into her beautiful eyes that he knew so well. Oh, she loved him, she loved him! False, treacherous heart, to give herself to another man! While in the agony of these thoughts he noticed Graham standing by him; he looked at her again. She must know everything. He determined to ask her.

“Mrs Graham,” he said, “I hear Miss Vane is going to be married. Will it be—soon?”

Graham looked at him in surprise.

“Oh, no, sir, you are mistaken,” she said. “My young lady is not going to be married.”

“But she is engaged?”

"No, sir, no. I am certain of it."

"But—but—" stammered Denvil, hardly able to speak in his excitement, "Lord Mannering—it is understood—"

He hesitated. Graham reflected a moment, and then decided to speak out. "No secret had been made by Mannering or anyone else of the situation, and she thought it better for Juliet that there should be no mistaken rumours.

"Lord Mannering has proposed to my young lady," she said, with quiet pride; "but she has refused him. I believe Lord Francis has begged her to alter her mind, but she has told his lordship she never can. That is how it stands, sir. It seems a pity, for Lord Mannering would make her very happy."

A mist swam before Denvil's eyes; he thought he should fall; emotion suffocated him. What ghastly mistake had led him to

insult Mannering—to use Juliet's name in such a way—to place himself in such a false position! Mannering had no more right to fight for her than he had himself! Oh, if they could but change places! While he was struggling with this confused rush of painful thought the moment was approaching when he had to go on the stage. He collected himself sufficiently to speak again to Graham.

“Heywood told me they were engaged to be married.”

“They are not, sir,” said Graham, emphatically.

Denvil's cue came; mechanically he went on to the stage. He had no thought for anything but Juliet. There she stood—the same agitation always came upon her at this entrance of his. He knew very well it was not feigned—that she was not acting at this moment. His voice had the power to change the colour

in her face. And especially when she knew that the next moment he would hold her in his arms, his breath on her face—for it was their love-scene now. Heywood left the stage, and Denvil came down to Juliet. Never had he acted as he acted to-night—never had that scene been given with such passion. The audience were thrilled by it—there were low murmurs of enthusiasm at every opportunity. He felt Juliet tremble as he held her. Oh, if he could carry her away now—if these words were but his own—and answered as he wished them to be, and he could take her away now from all the others who wished to rob him of her!

Heywood's return to the stage interrupted the scene; then followed the scene between the two men, ended by the guardian's maniacal attack on the lover. Denvil excelled himself in everything to-night; he

remembered Heywood's lie, as he concluded it to be now, about Juliet, and the struggle between the two men was terribly real. He made Heywood feel, and Heywood, who had by no means forgiven or forgotten the shaking he had received at Denvil's hands so lately, attacked him with a ferocity almost too well stimulated. Juliet stood horror-stricken in reality; there was something dreadful in the earnestness of that struggle. Had Heywood gone mad in reality? she wondered, and watched in horror.

The scene, fortunately, was terminated by a rush of the minor personages of the play, who are supposed to hear the noise and enter hurriedly. Juliet was thankful when this came. If Maurice should be hurt by that maniac! Her heart beat painfully. The curtain fell amid storms of applause. Heywood, Juliet and Denvil

always had to go before the curtain after this scene ; so she remained there, trembling, and looking apprehensively from one to the other. Denvil's coat was torn right across.

"Am I to appear like this?" he said to Heywood, who, however, made no answer ; he was panting, and looked like an enraged animal.

Juliet moved towards Denvil, and spoke to him under her breath.

"Is he mad—has he hurt you?" she said.

"No, no," he answered. "If anyone's hurt, it is the wretch himself. He told me a lie about you yesterday, and I have punished him for it. Oh, my darling, my darling, give me the right to protect you from all the world!"

They were almost the same words he had already spoken on the stage. Juliet looked at him, half in doubt if he spoke in his own person or no. At that moment the curtain was rung up, and

the three had to stand side by side to be applauded. To Juliet it seemed as if it did not come down again for an age—as if it was for an eternity that she had to face that sea of meaningless faces. But it came down at last. Heywood left the stage instantly; for a moment the two others were alone. The scene-shifters began their work, and in the noise they made it was impossible to be overheard.

“Juliet, do you love me?” said Maurice Denvil.

She turned and looked at him. Her face grew pale; she trembled. She was frightened at her own emotion. It mastered her utterly. She could not speak.

“Answer me,” he cried out. “Don’t keep me in agony—I cannot bear it!”

She put out her hand to him; he felt it tremble in his.

“Yes,” she answered.

"Oh, God, what joy!" he exclaimed. "To-morrow, Juliet—may I come and see you in the morning when you are alone?"

"Yes," she said again. The die was cast.

"You will be late," cried an agitated voice through the din made by the scene-shifters. It was Graham. Juliet snatched her hand away, and hurried after her dresser. She had to be quick, she well knew, having lost these few minutes. Lord Francis stood back to let her pass, in a narrow place in the corridor.

"How beautiful you look to-night," he said, involuntarily, as she passed him. "And how mad the people are about you!" he went on. "I believe they will tear you to pieces some day."

She flew on. Victoria Elwood, who had been sitting in her dressing-room, came out of it as she entered. She looked back after her, too, with the same thought.

"She has never looked so lovely." But she added another with the shrewdness of her kind, "Something must have happened!"

Denvil went to his dressing-room in a state of exultation impossible to describe. She was his. He had won her! He burst out laughing when he thought of Mannering and the meeting at Ostende. But the next minute he grew serious. How ridiculous to have to fight Mannering now, on such grounds! How dreadful to have to leave her and to run such risks so soon! But his pride would not let him think of drawing back. And even now that he was successful with Juliet he hated Mannering as much as ever for being his rival and having dared to hope—and then Denvil inflamed himself again by remembering that Mannering had done more — had challenged him as one who had the right to fight

for Juliet ! He had practically acknowledged that they were engaged ! What could it mean ? “Never mind,” said Denvil, trying to calm himself. “I shall know everything from her to-morrow morning.” And at that thought, at the mere thought of that meeting to come, rapture took possession of him again and he forgot his anger.

CHAPTER XVI.

“I know not what to do ; my mind is divided.”

JULIET was in her own room the next morning when Denvil's name was brought to her. She had been up and dressed a long while, but she had not wished to see anyone before she saw him, so she stayed quietly in her room as if she were resting. No one disturbed her there in the morning unless she wished it ; an actress works so late at night that she is not expected to begin the day as early as other people.

Graham came to tell her he had come, and was waiting for her in the drawing-room. It was an unusual hour for visitors ; and the old woman quickly put

two and two together. Juliet was dressed early that day; her toilette was simple but very perfect. "Evidently," thought Mrs Graham, "he was expected."

"It's a pity," she said to herself, after Juliet had gone down, "it's a pity. Lord Mannering would make her happy. But she'll only go where her heart is."

Denvil stood waiting by the open drawing-room window, looking out into the garden. Her hammock was swinging there, empty. How often he had watched her in it—the garden seemed desolate without her, spite of its beauty! But while he was thinking this he heard the door, and turning, saw her there. She was dressed in simple black, the deep mourning for her mother, which she had not lessened yet; but her face was so radiantly lovely that it needed no aids.

It is almost pitiable to see two creatures

love each other as these two did ; misery must inevitably follow such intense feeling' sooner or later, in the very nature of things. For a balance is always struck in this world, as all know who notice how strangely events arrive. And yet it is only those who love like this who have any knowledge of what wild joys life holds—of what it is to really live. Everyone who has experienced it confesses that it is better to suffer the pain that dogs such passion like a Nemesis than never to have known it. Yes, not only “better to have loved and lost,” but better to have loved and been deceived, to have loved and been dragged through the hell of jealousy, than never to have felt as these two felt now. Very quietly they met, and Juliet put her hand in his.

“Then it was not a dream ?” she said.
“You *did* ask me to let you come here this

morning? It all passed so quickly last night, I thought I must have dreamed it."

"A dream!—" said Denvil, "God! if it had been, I must have died of the awakening!"

And then he began to literally worship her. Remember for how long he had, every evening, talked love to her, held her hand, held her in his arms, and never dared to say one real word of love! And now she was all his own!—this lovely being, that he had regarded with such awe because of her sheer loveliness! They forgot everyone outside that room for a long while. But the sound of the garden gate roused Juliet at last. She rose to look out of the window.

"Oh, it is not papa yet," she said, with a sigh of relief; "but he may come at any moment. He is coming to lunch."

"Juliet," said Denvil, "tell me,

does he want you to marry Manner-
ing?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Then he won't approve of me," said Denvil with a sigh. "I have none of Manner-
ing's advantages."

"I know he does not approve of you—at least not in the way you mean?"

"Why—has he ever said anything?"

"Oh, yes. He was very complimentary to you. He seemed to think you dangerous, and warned me it was quite hopeless!—that he would never let me marry you."

Juliet hesitated before she said this. But a moment's thought decided her to speak out. It was better to do so at once, to her thinking. She could be quiet, and reticent, but she was incapable of the least deviation from the truth—especially with one she loved. She was one of the rare women to whom love is a sacred thing,

penetrating to the inmost recesses of the soul. In winning her love Denvil had won her absolute trust and confidence.

"Then we must do without his consent," said Denvil instantly.

The idea chimed well with his own wishes ; it was what he most desired ; why, will be seen later on.

Juliet looked at him in surprise. Denvil boldly advanced on the line he had started.

"My darling," he said "are you not free to choose for yourself? Are you not independent of Lord Francis? Surely if ever a woman was at liberty to take her life into her own hands, it is an actress who earns her own living as you do. If you love me, marry me, and do not hesitate."

Now, in the theatrical profession, marrying and giving in marriage are not usually discoursed of much by passionate lovers

like Maurice Denvil ; and not to any other woman he had ever met would he have said what he said now. He had never dreamed of marrying—or, at least, so far as his thoughts went that way, not yet ; he had thought he might marry for money or a home in the far future, when all his present life had died away from him. But now he was grasping at a prize which he felt it would be hard to win and might be hard to keep ; and with a peer of the realm as his chief rival it was no light matter.

“He very much wants me to marry Lord Mannering,” said Juliet thoughtfully.

“You shall not marry Lord Mannering. I’ll kill him first,” said Denvil, and he meant it. He was thinking with pleasure, at the moment, of Sunday, and Ostende, and the chance he would have of finishing Mannering’s career. And Juliet felt he

meant it. She liked him none the less. Women with a touch of the angel in them like to feel the savage in the men they love.

“We are going on tour very soon,” said Denvil, speaking more composedly. “Marry me quietly before then, Juliet, and travel as my wife. Oh, if you hesitate, you don’t love me as I do you! Where will Lord Francis be?—with you?”

“Oh, no!” said Juliet. “He is going to St Petersburg immediately, now that everything is arranged for me. He ought to have gone before, I believe, on some diplomatic mission. Mrs Elwood travels with me.”

“She need not come—she can stop at home and take care of your house!” said Denvil triumphantly. “You will be my wife before then. Yes, Juliet, it must be so.”

"You must let me think," said Juliet.
"I owe a duty to my father."

"But you know he will try and make you marry Mannering."

"Yes, I know that."

Denvil groaned. The thought was an agony to him. His passion touched Juliet, and made her utterly undecided.

"Give me a little time!" she said again.

"When does he go?" asked Denvil.

"Who?—my father?"

"Yes."

"In a few days."

Denvil was silent. He was doubting whether she would yield to his wish more easily when her father was gone. But—no—he judged her, rightly, to be one who acted from conviction, little swayed by circumstance or persuasion.

"Will you have decided when next I see you?" he asked.

“Yes—to-night. I shall be alone with my father some time to-day, and I will find out what I have to look for from him. Oh, that my mother lived, and I could talk to her! You must go now if you do not wish to meet him.”

“I will go,” said Denvil. “I had better not meet him to-day—not till you have decided.”

He rose.

“Oh, what a wrench it is!” he said. “What an age it will be till I see you this evening!”

END OF VOL. I.

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